TO THE TARGET

A Sporting Clays and Wingshooting Primer

Daniel L. Schindler

BOOK II

$29.95

To The Target is, in a way, a map. Using plain language, it cuts through the mystery of shooting and shows you the shortest route to breaking one target after another—from the first field to the last.

SHOT MECHANICS:

Advanced skills come from the application of techniques. ***To The Target*** gives you those techniques.

VISION:

Did you know the HOA's targets are visually larger, closer and slower than yours? ***To The Target*** shows you what the winners see and how they do it.

THE MENTAL GAME:

Your best shot occurs when you are relaxed and trusting what you've learned.

To The Target explains why your mental images—negative and positive—are tied directly to the outcome of each trigger pull.

The truth is, the successful shooting equation is not complicated. Target difficulty can be measured by *the shooter's skill*. The more you learn, the easier the presentation becomes.

To The Target answers your questions. You were born with talent—the performance you seek is in the chapters that follow!

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Taking the next step in the building process.

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First, we learn what to trust.

FOREWORD

by Peter Crabtree

N.S.C.A. Level III – British Guild of Shooting Instructors, Chairman

Wendy Crabtree – N.S.C.A. Level III

When I was the Chief Instructor for the National Sporting Clays Association, Wendy and I had the opportunity to work with Dan on numerous occasions. His resourceful but focused approach to teaching takes shooting's often-complicated mechanical equation and reduces it to its simplest form. This demanding skill is, in itself, a mark of a competent teacher.

To The Target possesses excellent technical information. Using the building block process he often refers to, Dan patiently shows you what to trust in the shooting box. Specific checkpoints guide you through the shot, removing much of the mystery that surrounds hits and misses. **To The Target** straightforwardly displaces apprehension in the box with technique and positive images. Gradually, using the methods in each chapter, he teaches you the purest shot of all using the mental game. All of this culminates in a fluid move on the target that is, in all ways, swift, elemental and dependable.

For those of you familiar with Dan's style of writing, you'll once again discover this book, too, provides you with a solid, informative foundation and a no-nonsense approach to the art of shotgunning. Dan's passion for teaching and his contagious enthusiasm flows from the pages that follow. His confidence in you, the reader, never falters. **To The Target** cites a wealth of common sense recommendations, all presented to the reader in an easily understood format with superb use of visualizations.

As shooters and instructors, Wendy and I genuinely enjoyed this book. You will too. As you turn the last page, it becomes obvious to you that Dan has spent years refining this information. With polished explanations, **To The Target** delivers a capable and satisfying shooting system. We applaud Dan's insights and persistence.

For those of you who wish to improve your shooting skills, the study and application of Dan's recommendations provides an honest opportunity to do so.

We wish him, and you, the very best in sporting!

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Book Two, dedicated to the intermediate sporting clays shooter.

A trip around the sporting clays range should be enjoyable in every way. During the novice stage, however, missing targets can tax expectations to the limits of your endurance. Congratulations! Through the most difficult passage of all, the novice stage, enduring a crazy mixture of X's and O's, you've slugged your way to learning a great deal about equipment, setups, strategies, methods and sight pictures. You've also discovered that the more you worked on the fundamentals, the less physical effort was required. Many of your associates still believe that performing well becomes harder as you progress to more accomplished skills. You've learned that's not true. If you practiced the fundamentals diligently, shooting became easier. You've persevered and are coming into a rewarding time in the shooting box. By the end of this book, more targets will break and time spent in the box will make a lot more sense.

With the target on its way, together we'll assemble a complete and very reliable shooting system.

I meet two different intermediate shooters in my travels. The first ones struggle because they are too dependent on instinct and have neglected to learn fundamental shooting techniques. The most common question I hear is, "Why am I so inconsistent—up one weekend, down the next?" The mystery surrounding that inconsistency isn't a mystery at all. In simple terms, many shooters approach each shot differently. Their shot execution is not the same from field to field. Because their mechanics are inconsistent, the results are inconsistent.

The second intermediate shooter, who's added knowledge and technique to instinct, is shooting respectable scores—consistently. His new struggle is to build even longer runs. This person is shooting intermediate scores but, understandably, still using novice techniques. Too often he has a tendency to examine and re-examine the basics as he progresses. With this book, slowly but surely, your attention will shift from the mechanics of the shot to trusting your body to do what it's learned, allowing you to focus on more important tasks.

Gaining knowledge and muscle memory makes each shot easier as you move up the learning curve.

Take Your Best Shot, Book One, provided the basics, laying down a solid and dependable foundation on which to build your sporting clays game. This book, for the intermediate shooter, *offers an inventory of information.* This inventory represents the rungs of the ladder as you ascend the learning curve.

Whereas **Take Your Best Shot** addressed your setup, equipment and shooting methods, **To The Target** assumes you have "done your homework" and the target's been launched. Because every target gives you a fixed amount of time to break it, understanding the importance of that time and how to use it provides a perspective on what is really happening in the shooter's box. Crushing targets, one after another, requires an organized approach and repetition of the successful shot equation. Excellent shooting skills are not magic. The HOA patiently builds long runs. You must also. **To The Target** teaches you how.

We take a look at each of the more challenging target presentations and step-by-step, provide the formula you need. I propose to you that there are no difficult targets, only those you haven't learned to hit yet. This book will help you do that.

Natural instincts are only the first of three building blocks needed to complete your shooting game. The second is technique. The third is the mental game, allowing all three to work together. In the later chapters, the mechanical components of your game are to be trusted and we turn your performance over to your mental game.

We then take a look at the ABC's of the mental game and why it is not optional, but necessary to the dedicated shooter. Whereas the early chapters present the individual components of the actual shot, the later chapters assemble those components and puts your shooting into overdrive.

Every day I prove to people just like you that they are much better shooters than they think they are. When applied correctly, the recommendations in this book allow you to perform above your expectations.

Section I

FINAL PREPARATIONS

CHAPTER 1

EXPECTATIONS

Managing Them Effectively

Having arrived for their class, most of my clients are coping with an avalanche of information—and misinformation—trying in earnest to better understand hits and misses. You already know, to achieve advanced shooting skills, you must be consistent in both the preparation and execution of every shot. To that end, each chapter in this book has been written to assist you in building a dependable, high-performance shooting system.

As you commence construction of your shooting system, it would be prudent to begin with those forces that affect your concentration, emotions and final score.

Let's put physical skills aside for a moment and examine your thoughts as you walk through the course.

Stepping out of the shooting box, we've all experienced frustration, disappointment, sometimes even anger. These are normal human emotions. When we allow them to disrupt our concentration on the next field, however, we've temporarily lost control of our game. Why does this happen? Before you skip this chapter, opting to read about battues or the mental game, I urge you to start here.

Whether novice or advanced, it seems we all share a common goal when we step into the box on Field One. Break that target! With tunnel vision and teeth clenched, many shooters are obsessed with racking up X's. The score sheet quickly sets the pace for our shooter's smiles or frowns. Missing is blamed on the gun, the weather, the course design, the sun and other outside factors, all of which have little influence on the actual performance in the box. Our shooter then adds stress to the shooting by unjustly labeling his or her skills as bad, or worse.

Our expectations play a major role in our shooting game. Yet, when was the last time you stopped to consider this as part of your game plan? The words "Dead" or "Lost" can make your trip around the course a rough one. Might your expectations be managing you, instead of you managing your expectations?

As a teacher in this sport, I meet a lot of people who have a lot of expectations. Often, it is these expectations that create the most problems.

When performance falls short of expectations, people tend to feel

they've "failed." To miss a target is to experience "defeat" and all the negative emotions that go with it. This is regrettable, and in all ways counterproductive.

Shooting performance should not be judged in terms of your being "good" or "bad." That becomes an *emotional judgment* which in turn erodes every part of your shooting game.

Remember, I also love to compete. That's why, as a teacher, I can forgive your feeling disappointed over a miss. But no more than that. Forgive yourself quickly. Assess the miss. Make the necessary adjustment to the shot. Kill the remaining birds and step out feeling good about yourself. Reminiscing and discussing the miss for too long is pushing you towards your next miss. Since this book is about increasing final target count, it is imperative that you see a miss as an opportunity to make the next shot a better one.

I can't count the times I've observed a student working for hours learning how to implement a specific technique. Clear, measurable progress is evident. I'm not kidding—we're into a serious long run of broken targets. Yet, after three missed targets in a row, disaster may only be one more miss away. We can all see the three misses. It's how we view them that's different. Regrettably, our shooter's attention has become tightly focused on the misses. Worse, personal abilities are now being questioned in our shooter's mind. In reality, my student's abilities are fully intact. Confidence is faltering because he or she is doubting ability rather than *correctly focusing on a small technical error in the shot.* After making a simple adjustment on the approach to this target, we start another long run. No muss, no fuss.

Missing is a natural and unavoidable part of this game. Everyone misses targets. What matters most is how you handle the miss. Put the missed target behind you, quickly, and focus on the next target.

Most people have a limited understanding of what should, and actually does, take place in the shooting box. Both hits and misses are mostly a mystery. Knowledgeable, trained shooters have a tremendous advantage in the shooting box. They know the miss was a simple mechanical error on their part and not a personal failure or lack of ability. They fix their error, quickly, and keep those X's coming. When you miss, you have a choice. You can be negative about it or positive. Make the right choice. **Learn from a miss. Use it to your advantage!**

It's not productive to expect a great performance before learning the many techniques that are an integral part of this game. Like other skills, sporting clays begins with the basics. These are followed by intermediate techniques, which are followed by advanced tactics. To keep our

expectations under control, we need to understand the building block process of our game. There is a learning curve with checkpoints along the way.

Right here, in each of the chapters that follow, you'll learn what to do, when to do it and how to do it. You have zero control over the target, but gun management is in your capable hands. This is your first important step into the mental game. A cornerstone. Manage your misses in a positive way—no compromises here. Execute the shot to the best of your ability. Learn and apply the new techniques. Scores and performance will take care of themselves.

CHAPTER 2

BEFORE YOU SAY "PULL"

It's no secret; we all like to break targets. So much so that sometimes we get caught up in wanting to break the target, and the pressure we put on ourselves can be enormous. Too often, planning the shot and finishing the setup is put aside and what surfaces is the desire to shoot, right now. Then, when the targets do appear, we suffer the consequences.

Every fair target gives us enough time to break it. But every mistake we make during the set up, or the shot, takes additional time to correct. That's "extra" time the target won't give us, and we don't have. Mistakes in our setup result in poor time management and cost us targets. Hurrying the shot to correct our mistakes doesn't lend itself to smooth, efficient shooting.

In **Take Your Best Shot**, doing your homework refers to your setup. It begins with Number 1, the **Break Point.** Choosing where you plan to break the target(s) starts your set up and helps you select the best chokes and loads.

Number 2 in your setup is your **Foot Position.** Placing your feet towards your break points delivers a smoother gun swing and sets up the body to generate critical muzzle speed. It only takes a second to adjust your feet and balance. Underestimating the importance of foot position can prove to be a costly error.

Number 3 is the **Muzzle Hold Point (MHP).** Proper muzzle placement, both horizontally and vertically, will make each shot proportionately easier or harder.

Done last before calling for your target is Number 4 the **Focal Point.** Stated in simple terms: Let your peripheral vision handle the blurred launch of the target. Direct your vision to the spot where the target will come into focus.

When it comes to choosing your weapon for scoring purposes, I suggest you give a little more attention to gun fit, balance and overall feel or dynamics. Handle the various shotguns and notice how they feel different in your hands. Wider fore-ends usually feel best in larger, broader hands. Smaller hands might opt for a leaner, trimmer fore-end. The same is usually true for the trigger hand as it encircles the grip. As for barrel lengths, they're

a trendy subject. There is a place for the 32", but I strongly recommend the 28" or 30" for overall use.

The knowledgeable shooter focuses not only on fit and feel, but also takes a hard look at weight and balance. Generally speaking, for the stack barrels, it's hard to go wrong in the 8½-pound range for the average male. Trim a half-pound off for the auto-loader. The balance point should be centered over the hinge pin, and a slight *rearward* tilt gets the nod. Weight and balance are assets or liabilities depending upon how and where they are applied.

Why are weight and balance so important?

Because a gun should move precisely **where** you want it to, **when** you want it to. When the hands begins to move, the gun *must* keep up. If your strategy and set up are good, and you're chasing the target, gun mount or an incorrect MHP is usually the culprit. But gun weight may also be slowing you down. A gun that is too light is no bargain either. A 6½-pound gun may be delightful on a long grouse or quail hunt, but it will more than likely race past sporting clay targets, putting you out of control. So, adequate weight and central balance stabilize your gun. Too much or too little weight creates a control problem.

Whereas a nose-heavy gun can steer like an overloaded wheelbarrow, a *central* balance point keeps the weight between your hands. Once achieved, this allows you to move the gun with precision, at various speeds for target acquisition and punctual shot completion. When you've finished reading this book, and the chapters on gun mount in particular, here's the rule of thumb. With the target on its way, even before the gun reaches your cheek, your muzzle should be where you want it to be at that critical instant. If it has drifted too far ahead of the target, or is lagging too far behind, there's a problem. Provided your gun *mount* is correct, if your gun makes you work to break targets, consider making a change for the better. The best shotgun for you is the one that feels and moves like an extension of your body.

Having good shooting habits means being prepared. Your setup is the foundation of every single shot you make, so build it carefully. The ill-prepared shooter is forced to *react* when the targets appear. The knowledgeable, ready competitor calmly *responds* to each shot.

Most of the sporting clays shotguns are of good to excellent quality. Take your time and choose one that feels the best in your hands. (See Chapter 21) The more you shoot, the more confidence in your weapon becomes important.

CHAPTER 3

MHP

Achieving A Punctual Intercept

This chapter assumes you've reviewed the importance of the muzzle hold point (MHP), as explained in Book One. The correct placement of your muzzle during your set up will make this shot faster, easier and more productive. Here's why.

A proper MHP makes it easier to get the "hands" or "gun" aligned with the target, its speed and direction. We must be prepared to intercept that moving target—precisely and punctually. **Target intercept is the key function of the MHP, because it's the starting point of the swing path and it helps you guide the muzzle To The Target.**

The MHP—left, right, up or down—should be relatively close to the target line. On or under the line works best and varies according to presentation. This is especially true on longer targets, or clays that hide and suddenly appear, rising or diving. Experienced shooters and novices alike find breaking a target harder or easier, depending on small changes made in the MHP.

So where do you place the muzzle?

An accurate answer to that question depends on a number of variables. Where is the trap? How fast is the target? How much time do you have? Are you an aggressive or more methodical shooter? The answer to each of these questions changes the MHP, sometimes drastically.

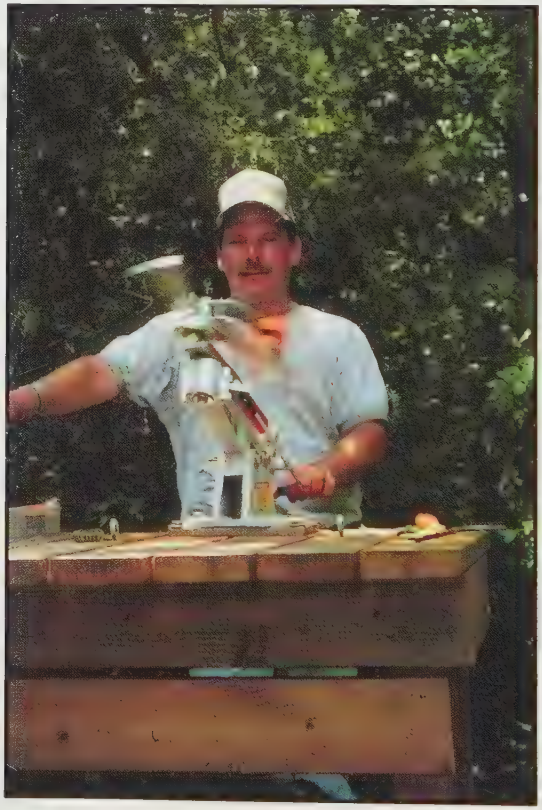
That said, here are a few simple and general guidelines.

Push the MHP back far enough to generate ample gun speed. However, when the trap is close to you, pushing the MHP well back into a target's speed is trouble. Letting the targets get by your MHP by more than a fraction results in your chasing the targets—with you out of control. Try to find a balance between 1.) waiting too long to intercept a target and 2.) moving into the trap too far and discovering the target just blew by you.

An efficient gun mount requires that the gun and target move in unison. From a time management standpoint, your intercept of the target must be as *punctual* as it is precise. A tardy intercept contributes to chasing the target and loss of valuable time. A careless intercept puts you "around" the target, not on it. The MHP you choose, and its degree of accuracy, can largely determine the ease or difficulty of the shot proportionately.

To summarize, here's the swing thought I give my students. When that last target appeared, which of these two feelings did you experience: "There it goes" or "Here it comes?" "There it goes" usually means you are chasing the target and out of control. With the proper set up, look hard at the target and start that gun moving (See Chapter 11). With the gun moving into the target, you should feel **"Here it comes,"** putting you in control of the shot. Your MHP starts this process.

Many times I've helped someone with particularly troublesome targets just by adjusting their MHP. Experience can teach you how to fine-tune it for each situation. Adjust your MHP to intercept and merge with that target quickly, keep the gun mount smooth, and the sight picture you want should appear on or ahead of schedule. Good time management = more X's.



Another great trapper.

CHAPTER 4

STRATEGIES: FROM RED LIGHT TO GREEN

Most people feel they don't have very much control over the shot once the target appears. Once the clay does appear: 1.) they are not sure what to do first; 2.) they feel they have scarce time to shoot and panic; and 3.) they experience an overpowering need to break the target.

All three of these things affect performance, and most shooters feel helpless to change them. Here is what causes this scenario, and what you can do about it.

Shooting without a plan forces the mind and body to react to a situation instead of calmly responding. As you would expect, give the unprepared mind and body only a few short seconds to complete a complicated task, and they are bound to make mistakes. **The human mind, which I refer to as your computer, functions more smoothly when given precise, easily understood instructions before the target appears.**

The difference between having and not having a plan when the target arrives is simply this. Those without a plan are forced into thinking about "what to do" **during** the shot. When the target comes into view, thoughts like, "Look at how fast it's going! How much lead do I need? Where should I break it? Where's the other target?" all lead to panic. Each of these thoughts runs to the front of the line for your attention. This can result in shot after shot being a form of crisis management, instead of a well-rehearsed plan that's calmly executed step-by-step.

The shooter with a specific and coordinated strategy already knows exactly what will happen when the target appears. Instead of reacting to whatever surprises the target brings, there are no surprises. The computer notes the target's arrival, and step by step, the shot goes off as planned. With a well-planned strategy, to the immense delight of my students, there's no need to rush, so the panic to shoot quickly is gone. Our shooter is already confident that he or she can break the target, so the mind can relax and focus on the attack. The results are predictable, not a mystery that unfolds to a different ending every time he or she pulls the trigger.

The key point here is that a prepared shooter does things on purpose. His simpler, common sense approach delivers a trustworthy strategy, and presents his computer with a much smaller to-do list.

Before stepping into the box, here's a simple **pre-shot** checklist:

- Which bird do I shoot first? Note target speeds and distances for prioritizing each shot—then factor in chokes and loads (pg. 95)
- Type of each target? Factor in chokes and loads
- Set up to neutralize the target's defense
- Rehearse windows (forward allowance or sight pictures) for each target

As you step into the box, everything you are about to do should be done for a reason. Advance preparations give you the best chance to maximize your score. You are now prepared to do something on purpose, and not simply react to the target's appearance.

Preparing the shot should be a high priority before the target is launched. There is a right and wrong approach to the upcoming pair. The more you prepare, the easier it becomes.

If this sounds like work, it isn't. It's the opposite. Getting your strategy in place ahead of time allows your attack on the target to be smooth and deliberate.

Here's where planning ahead pays off.

Chapter 5

SHOOTING METHODS

It's The Sight Picture That Counts--Not How You Get There

Shooting methods are the subject of many debates and controversy. No harm in that. However, you should have, and use, what we call a foundation method. That one particular shooting method should serve you well, day-in and day-out, on a wide variety of targets. Give me a target presentation and I'll give you a method that will work. Give me a student and we go a little slower in choosing a foundation method.

So, which one should you pick?

The best one.

The best shooting method is the one that's best for you. I say this because first, they all work, and work very well and second; because each and every one of you comes into the shooting box with your own talents, opinions and shooting instincts. Until I watch you shoot a dozen targets, I can't tell you what's best for you. What I can tell you are the basic pros and cons of each.

The Churchill method is a favorite for closer, often faster targets. It relies on ample gun speed and asks that the shooter feel a sense of shooting right at the target. When applied properly, Churchill allows you to feel connected to the target. This method gets a strong pointing motion underway as soon as possible and leans heavily on trust and instinct to kill the target. To an observer, Churchill looks fast, but smooth. The shooter does not feel rushed, and after gaining some experience with this, trusts the hands to find and kill the target. Rather than a step one, step two approach, Churchill is mainly a point and shoot proposition—albeit a deadly one, have no doubt.

If one falters with Churchill, it will probably be on targets beyond the 35 to 40-yard marker. Having a back-up or second method would be prudent. And that goes for all the methods.

Pull through (aka swing-through) and pull away are similar. Both require acceleration away from the target. They differ with their respective insert points. Whereas pull away asks that you insert *on* the target, swing-through requires that you come in from slightly *behind* the target. Having done so, for both methods, the gun is accelerated beyond the target and the trigger pull is punctual. These two methods are excellent for a very good

reason. They both generate gun speed in ample amounts, and gun speed kills targets.

Hold onto this: **the majority of the top shooters in the world are accelerating away from their targets when they pull the trigger.** The pull away and the swing-through method both generate the gun speed needed to kill the target. Pull the trigger as the gun clears the other side of the target—right now—no delays. Also, don't let the acceleration go into turbo mode. Just accelerate past or through and pull the trigger.

Strong on the majority of our targets, it's important to execute each of these methods in one smooth move, not two. Should a target change its direction rapidly, these two methods can be cumbersome.

Pushing the long run to the max!

Last, but not by lack of virtue, is the sustained or maintained lead method. Executed properly, maintained lead starts you in front of the target and keeps you there. A favorite with skeet shooters, for many good reasons, this method is often overlooked by the sporting clays shooter. It shouldn't be. As time passes, your computer is logging and putting into inventory sight pictures that break targets. Starting and staying in front of a target can be a good idea. If you already know what sight picture will break this target (see Chapter 12) why not go there and pull the trigger? If you've missed the intercept slightly and need a larger window, pull away and fire. Modifying a maintained lead picture is fast and relatively easy. If the target is close and fast, or flying through a narrow shooting lane, maintained lead can be difficult to execute. Churchill or swing-through gets the nod here.

A client who uses maintained lead recently asked me how he could insert his muzzle in front of the target, and go **To The Target** at the same time. I asked him to remember that a shotgun is a weapon that's pointed, not aimed. As a maintained lead shooter—driving his hands **To The Target**—when the stock reaches his face he finds himself in front of the target. Through practice and repetition, the computer between your ears

knows where you want to be and will get you to the right picture—on or in front of the target—*automatically*. When the gun mount begins, the hands desperately need direction. **To The Target** provides that direction. Your computer will provide any further adjustment as the shot develops.

Bottom line here: try each method. At least one should be to your liking. Stay with it. Modify it slightly if need be. A lot of my students shoot a "home-made" method. Whereas the novice needs to focus on developing his or her method, as an intermediate you should be focused on establishing some consistency with yours. In the chapters ahead, we'll be discussing sight pictures, the all important visual target-muzzle relationships. Achieving consistency with your method will allow us to readily acquire those sight pictures.

Book III will address the needs of the advanced competitor. Less than half our work will be on the mechanics of shooting. Learning how to score with your mental game gets primary attention. By then, you should be comfortable and confident with your method(s). Why? Because later, I'm going to ask you to lean heavily on your experience, and trust what you've learned. By that time, the method you're using will be incidental. By then, we'll be well past how it works, and depending on it **to work.** You won't be able to concentrate on your method and breaking the target at the same time. Every physical part of the shot should be automatic—without thought—relegated to your subconscious.

That's why learning how to execute the shot properly is becoming more, not less, important. Establishing consistency now is the path to more advanced techniques.

My student is rehearsing; simplifying the shot process.

CHAPTER 6

MOUNT—MOVE—SHOOT

Grading Time Management

Every target gives us a specific amount of time in which to shoot. The target is launched, it flies, it lands.

Since the time we have is "fixed," let's look at how we spend that time, or our **time management.**

When the trap fires, the time available to shoot begins to decrease. When the target appears, the shooter first *mounts* his gun to his shoulder. The move portion of the attack is then a tank turreting motion, where the gun and body are chasing the target, followed by the shot. All of this "out-of-sequence" movement is called MOUNT—Move—Shoot.

So, why are they chasing the bird? Is the fixed time being used efficiently?

Assume we have a left to right crosser, with a little zip on it, about 35 yards away. Mounting the gun first is an **upward** movement. During this upward movement, the target traveled five to ten yards *to the right.* Our shooter has no choice but to chase the escaping target—quickly.

Further complicating the situation, many shooters raise their trigger hand first, faster than their fore-end hand. I call this the "chain saw" gun mount because the motion of the trigger hand resembles pulling the cord on a chain saw. The result of this upward snap is that the fore-end hand acts as a fulcrum and the muzzle goes diving into the dirt! Done in slow motion, this is easy to see. Now, as precious time ticks away, not only does the muzzle have to go right to catch the escaping target, it also has to come up! Consider for a moment, what the target has been doing during this excessive, time consuming movement. Valuable time has been lost.

From the corn fields, duck blind, trap and skeet fields, we have learned to get that gun up—in a hurry. Mounting first leaves us with the slow and cumbersome tank turret movement to move and shoot. There seems to be some kind of security in having that stock nestled against the cheek. The first and most natural instinct is to raise the gun into the shooting position as quickly as possible. As natural as this may feel, however, Mount—Move—Shoot costs you targets.

Once adjusted, a corrected gun mount yeilds impressive results. It's that small adjustment that makes all the difference.

Notes

Section II

BUILDING A SHOOTING SYSTEM

The Target is Launched

CHAPTER 7

MOVE—MOUNT—SHOOT

To The Target

After a target is launched, there are four important steps that should occur. The order of their occurrence may vary, depending upon the target presentation. These four steps are **checkpoints.** Should you miss the target, you can refer to each checkpoint and ask yourself whether you complied.

The first checkpoint deals with a gun mount that delivers speed and precise direction. Move-mount-shoot delivers the gun speed. I maintain that the gun must also have direction as well as movement. So, where are the hands going? The answer is: the first checkpoint, **To The Target.**

This chapter may also explain some of your inconsistencies.

One of the most critical components of the successful shooting equation is the gun mount. With an hour or two of supervision, gun mount corrected, my client's shooting ability improves dramatically.

Why?

Move—Mount—Shoot is faster and more efficient, allowing you to go right **To The Target.**

For countless generations and from earliest childhood, we've all had the natural ability to extend our hands precisely where our eyes were looking. This is commonly known as eye-hand coordination. Roll a ball to a one-year-old in the sitting position and the hands will move toward the ball. Roll a Kleenex into a ball and ask a three-year-old to stand and face you. Toss it to the youngster gently. The hands will instinctively reach for the ball of Kleenex. Thousands of times, I've tossed an empty hull to one of my students, sometimes as a surprise. Almost always, they catch the shell!

There's a natural shooter inside each of us, who's been locked away. As we grew up with a shotgun, we learned how important it was that we get the gun up to our face and line everything up even on a moving target. Getting that gun to our face was first. In learning this, we've forgotten that a shotgun is an instrument that's *pointed,* not aimed. Pointing is an instinctive, relaxed process. It's timing and flow. It goes "to the target," and is as natural as pointing your finger.

If I ask you to point at the next pheasant that flushes, your hand wouldn't go to your face. The hand would follow your eyes. Visually, your finger would be glued to the pheasant. No problem. Anyone can do it—a hundred times with no mistakes and regardless of how fast the object is moving. Yet, with gun in hand, let another pheasant flush and watch the gun mount to the face. Then watch the pheasant sail over the hedgerow.

I've watched the hunter dispatch an exploding grouse or quail that burst from cover, with little more than a second to fire. There wasn't time to mount the gun and chase the target; so the hands and gun *moved* **To The Target,** not the face. Without thought, *instinctively,* the gun was pointed and fired. That is the natural flow of **To The Target** with MOVE—Mount—Shoot.

Clay targets give us time. That's when mistakes begin.

The term **gun management** refers to the mechanics of your gun setup, mount, and alignment (intercept) with the moving target. The better the gun management, the better the time management (Chapter Three). Errors in gun management cost time; poor time management costs targets.

Assuming our setup is reasonably correct, to manage time effectively with each target, we need to improve our gun mount's efficiency. Poised and correctly prepared, we wait for the target to appear. It does. This time, instead of the gun racing upward to your face, the hands move **toward and with the target.** This will be referred to as **To The Target.**

This gentle, s-h-o-r-t push of the hands starts the gun moving.

Muzzle speed without direction wastes precious time. Moving your hands **To The Target** first correctly starts the shot. **To The Target** delivers gun speed with direction. Target intercept is punctual and precise. Time consuming, mechanical corrections to bring the gun and the target into alignment aren't needed.

When the target appears, the fore-end hand, arms, shoulders and gun should all be moving with the target—**during** the gun mount. Clients invariably tell me they have much more time to shoot. Do they have more time? No, but with zero time wasted, more time is available.

It's common to hear students say, "I feel like I'm moving in slow motion." Because the hands are locked on the moving target, the shooter doesn't have to play catch-up or correct mistakes to achieve target-muzzle lock-up. The panic to shoot quickly is gone.

MOVE—Mount—Shoot really does look and feel slower, but is actually faster. It is faster because it puts the gun in motion with precise direction. The target is no longer in control of your shot. When your hands intercept and lock on the target (earlier because of the mount and better

direction), you begin to know this target is going to break before you pull the trigger. Now *you* are in control of the shot, not the target.

Bill Appel, an associate and respected Pennsylvania instructor, likes to tell his students, *"Let the target steer the muzzle."* Those are words worth remembering.

To conclude, don't get confused on this time management issue. Good time management does not mean you should mount and shoot faster. Slow down. Going **To The Target** with your hands, (Move—Mount—Shoot) is fast.

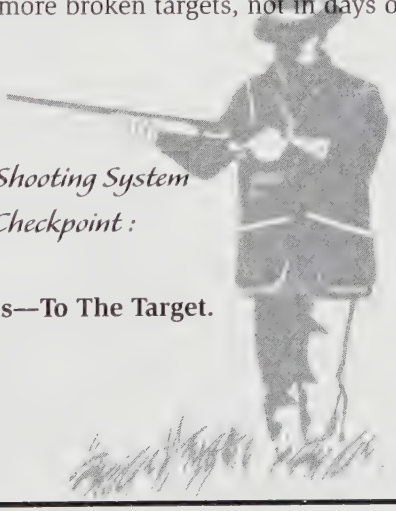
Let's try low house on a skeet field, standing midway between positions two and three.

First, slow down. No, slower. Shoot this target in slow motion if you have to. Move your muzzle hold point out from the trap house slightly so the target doesn't beat you when launched. We can't be playing catch up here. When the target appears, push the gun towards the target. The push must be short and gentle or you can go out of control. This little push gets both hands going in the right direction. Move LEFT, and up, in **one** smooth motion. Hands and gun speed should match the target speed. Don't race and don't dawdle. **Let the target speed set your gun speed.**

As a learning exercise, for a full second, move the gun with the target. The trigger hand is not allowed to push the muzzle off the target. Finish your shot only when the gun and target are moving in unison.

Pushing your hands to and with the target will feel different for a few dozen shots. Stay with it and watch what happens.

Taking your hands **To The Target** with the proper gun mount (Move—Mount—Shoot) delivers more broken targets, not in days or weeks, but in minutes!



Your Shooting System Checkpoint :

1. Hands—To The Target.

CHAPTER 8

THIS GUN MOUNT BUSINESS

Some Assembly Required

It is imperative that your muzzle intercepts the target punctually. An efficient gun mount does that. A successful gun mount starts with gun movement that locks on the target and tracks the target flight path. Both hands should move simultaneously. Pulling or pushing the gun off the target, to any degree, creates mistakes that you will now have to correct. The key is to match alignment and speed between the gun and the target. I call this "getting in harmony" with the target.

This can be as fast as you need it to be. Looking at a blazing, quartering away midi, I ask my student to slow down. Slow down? Yes. A smoother gun mount with precise direction is already fast because it has fewer wasted motions. Just go **To The Target.** Any panic or rushed movement will disrupt the intercept. Slow or fast, both hands are moving at the same pace as the clay. Don't let either hand get overly aggressive, pushing the muzzle wide of the target.

When time is short, shooters often panic and go back to Mount—Move—Shoot. The gun races to the face, time is wasted and the target is missed. For those of you with aggressive trigger hands that pull up sharply, I'm suggesting you slow down that trigger hand. The *short* push of both hands towards the target gives priority to the fore-end hand and starts gun movement, not to the face, but **To The Target.**

The entire gun mount should look fluid, completed in one gliding movement. Take a left-to-right presentation, for example. Done correctly, the fore-end hand moves across, and the trigger hand up, *in unison,* and in one continuous motion.

In the beginning, you may break the target a little further down the flight path than before. That's OK. The break point will move back to its previous position after you are acclimated to the new mount. It won't be long before the break point begins to move even further back, because the new mount is so much faster and offers more control than the old.

Move—Mount—Shoot not only supports but greatly enhances each of the four basic shooting methods from Churchill to sustained lead. On faster target presentations, the mount may feel slower—but the muzzle will find the target faster, giving you better time and gun management! Targets will

break when you want them to, as opposed to when you finally catch up.

Perseverance here pays big dividends. Regardless of skill level, learning and implementing this gun mount accelerates your progress. *Moving* your hands **To The Target** delivers more X's, consistently and with less work. You've never lost this wonderful, natural instinct to reach and touch a moving object. Why not put it to good use?

Still don't believe me? Here, catch this!

Now that you did, where did your hands go? Right, **To The Target**!

It won't matter if the target goes up, down, left, right, in or out. Once your hands lock onto that target, you own it!

Discussing the intercept—time management.

Chapter 9

LIGHTING YOUR PATH TO THE TARGET

The Second Checkpoint

In Chapter 7, we established there are four checkpoints in the shooting equation. The first was moving your hands **To The Target.**

The second checkpoint relates to your visual focus on a target. **The importance of this chapter can not be overstated.** To illustrate what constitutes a "hard visual focus," here is the article I wrote for a 1998 issue of *Sporting Clays* magazine.

To hit a golf ball, baseball, hockey puck or a diving battue at 40 yards, your hands had better be going in the right direction. The baseball's traveling at speeds well over 90 mph, and the hockey puck, well, ask the goalie. At least these people are within arm's reach of their target. We play a game where a target 1 inch high and 4 inches across settles into the high grass at 60 yards and we're trying to intercept it with a measly ounce of lead sprinkle. On paper, at least, all this looks impossible. But people do it every day.

How?

One of our most famous baseball players explained to reporters that he could see the stitching on the baseball as it crossed the plate. Really? Skeptical to the last man, the bet was made.

Retrieving his bat, under watchful eyes, pine tar was smeared on the barrel of the bat above the handle. Pitcher in place, our batter stepped up to the plate. He asked for a fast ball down the center and the pitcher obliged. At the crack of the bat, the ball was launched into deep center field where, as agreed upon, no one waited to catch it.

Sauntering over to the waiting reporters, he told them the bat met the ball right where the stitching curved at its closest, sometimes called the neck of the seams.

A reporter retrieved the ball and walked up to the growing crowd of onlookers. In his hand was the tar-marked ball. The batter had predicted the location of the mark correctly.

I will leave the truth of the story to your discretion. Personally, I believe it. Here's why.

Place an old phonograph record on the turntable and start the machine. Now, can you read the spinning label to me, word for word? I know people who can. My father had what was referred to as fighter pilot eyes. By good fortune, I have similar vision. All my life I've been able to see things at long distances that others couldn't. Some of our top competitors are capable of breaking targets very quickly. Putting aside the fact that these men can shoot, I attribute much of their lightning quickness to superb vision.

Unless I've missed something, clay target sports are extremely dependent upon vision. If you doubt me, step into the box, load, close your eyes and say pull.

Though I haven't met one of these individuals, I've been told there are some that can see the dimples on a spinning clay target. Again, I believe this to be true.

How you view a target has a direct bearing on the outcome of each shot.

Seeing the target clearly is crucial to breaking targets with some consistency. Why? As the target approaches, what guides the hands? Right, the eyes. When the hands move, their direction is largely dependent upon where the eyes are focused.

Let's examine a standard 108mm clay target. First, there's the concave underside. Moving outward and up our fingers usually hold the clay by the vertical, wrap-around skirt or rim. Moving up again we come to the sharp step that circles the target, leading us upward. Above the step is the rounded shoulder of the target where the dimples are placed. Finally, there is the top, called the dome.

I wish I could tell you that I see dimples on the clay when I shoot, but I can't. Nor can my students—but my how we try! What we can see are the sharp, crisp edges of the rim. If the target's turned slightly or in a teal presentation, I ask my students to bore their eyes into the dome.

Ask your trapper to hand you a rabbit target. Study it closely. Assuming the rabbit is crossing at less than 25 yards, can you see the rolling rabbit picture in the center of the target? Some of my students can. All are looking hard.

How hard are you focusing on the target? Believe it or not, those who focus hard on the target don't just break the clay. They center it. They're hitting the target with the core of their shot string. If applied to every shot, think what that would mean to your score by the end of a round.

Here's an exciting and somewhat startling demonstration. It is best done in an open area where you can easily view the bird launch, flight and landing. The next time you go to your local sporting clays range, find a crossing target approximately 15 to 20 yards away. Now, look directly ahead at a fixed point on the target flight path. Do not move your eyes left or right. Do not look at the trap or the landing area. With your eyes locked in the straight ahead position, call for the target. When the target goes by, hold your eyes still. Call for the target twice more.

Those who have participated in this demonstration will tell you the target literally smokes across their focal point. It races by, almost flowing a long orange tail. It's a **blur.** We call this the eight-foot-long target.

Now, turn your head and look directly at the trap. Call for the target, and, with your finger, follow this bird all the way to the ground. Looking to the trap and pointing at this bird from launch to landing lets us see this dawdling, almost snail-like bird with crystal clarity.

Seeing a crisp edge or a sliver of the bottom of a crossing target makes the target visually fly slower. I refer to this as **slowing the bird down with your eyes.**

Many shooters regularly see the first target. It's a blur or a streak. Quite possibly the target appears *longer* than it really is. This is called putting a *soft* focus on the target.

Those who see distinct, sharp edges on the clay are using a **hard** focus.

It's time to ask the question again. What guides the hands? The eyes. With a soft focus on the target, the hands and gun are moving to some place *around* the target, not directly to the target. So where will the shot string go? Good question.

Each of us may see the target differently, but it's critical that the bird be in sharp focus.

Let's go back to Sporting Clays 101.

When a student tells me he sees both targets of a simultaneous pair, is he using a soft or hard focus? Unless they've been taped together, he can't have a hard focus on two targets at the same time. (With this student watching *two* birds, what is guiding the hands and where is the gun going? All bets are off on where the first and second shots are headed.)

By looking at a target with a hard focus, your eyes are correctly locked on *one* target in your pair. Chances are good it's dead. Moving to the second target and seeing it clearly the results will probably be the same.

Because this particular shooting lesson emphasizes visual focus, I place my student in a box I've chosen. The red spring Lincoln on our right

delivers a rather hasty quartering presentation through the trees. A *causal* observation reveals a racing target. Sound familiar? At the sound of the shot, a quizzical look appears on my student's face. "Where did I miss it?" he asks.

From the instructor's position it wasn't hard to see the mistake coming. With the muzzle in too deep and his eyes looking at the trap, the target raced past his gun and momentarily out of his sight. His only choice was to launch the gun into space without direction, chase the target down and fire as the target sailed away intact. The target was a blur from start to finish.

Quietly, I ask, "*Why* did you miss?"

This was his first lesson with me, but target focus was an issue we had discussed on the last two fields. I wanted him to think.

Like most shooters, the desire to shoot and break targets often overrides the need to set the shot up properly and calmly execute it as planned. It took a moment of silence and then I saw the smile that told me he had figured it out. Soft focus.

Moving his focal point and muzzle hold out a little further will now give him time to see the target clearly, get the target and the muzzle into the right picture, and fire. This controlled response to the target gets the desired result.

Taking two steps back, I watch him *slow the target down* and break the next six in a row. Remember the predator instinct discussed earlier? When the eyes focus on an object hard enough, the hands move to the target automatically.

Here's another case.

A felon's gun appears out of nowhere and a state trooper is forced to rapidly draw and fire in self-defense. According to statistics, 64% of those first shots don't hit the felon. The shot hits the criminal's weapon. What is the trooper looking at?

The shotgun can deliver the break, but not without guidance. Visual target focus will move that shotgun in the right direction. Yet, lapses of concentration are common. The next time you miss, think about your focus on the target. Was it a hard focus or soft?

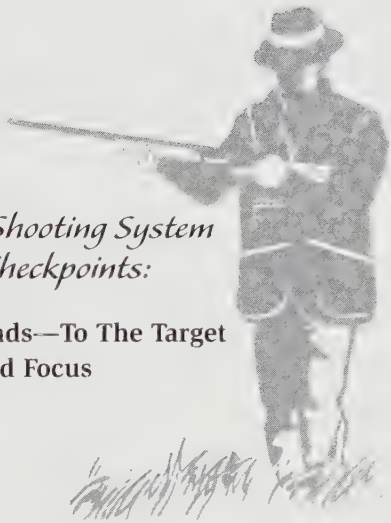
Also, always wear your eye protection.

What's the fastest way to bring your gun into a single target? Look at it hard and slow it down.

All those that agree, say aye.

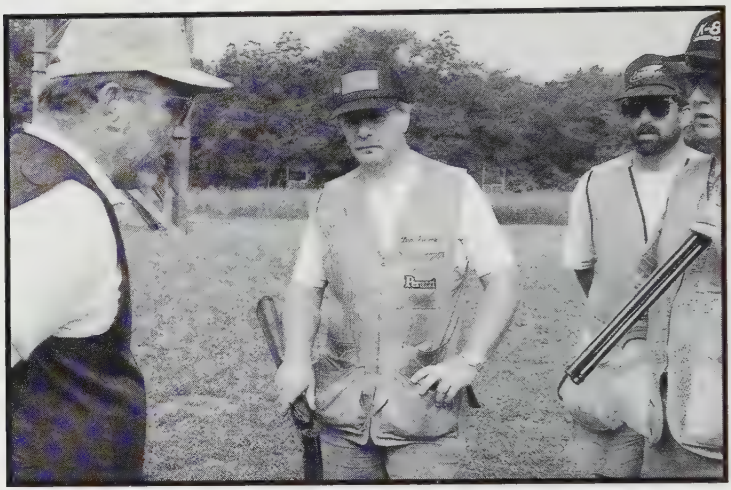
Those that don't?

Well, I'll be darned, the eyes have it.



Your Shooting System Checkpoints:

1. Hands—To The Target
2. Hard Focus



Teaching future instructors the importance of focus.

Protecting the eyes of all participants and spectators, on any target range, is a matter of paramount importance.

Humans have a natural ability to point accurately at moving objects, regardless of the speed of the object.

The skill of accurately connecting the muzzle with the target largely depends upon the ability to see the target clearly.

When a moving target is visually blurred, the ability to intercept the target is impaired.

Sporting clays shooters who can see the crisp edges of a target add precision to their gun movement and greatly improve their chances of hitting the target consistently.

A hard focus will make the target appear slower, larger and closer.

Putting a hard focus on your target should be intentional, not incidental.

Notes

Chapter 10

HOW MANY TARGETS IN A PAIR?

You'd be surprised at how many shooters don't think about this subject, and it is so very, very important.

As you stand in the box preparing to say "pull," here is the question: How many targets are there in a pair?

One.

I'll also accept two **singles.**

Let's start with the eyes. When two targets rise into the air, many competitors scan both targets with their eyes. As an instructor, countless times I've watched my client's muzzle move towards target one, only to change direction and accelerate towards number two. On some occasions the gun will, at the last second, race back to number one before the first shot is fired. All of this tells me my student is looking at **both** targets. So where should the hands go? **To The Target.** Target is singular. When the eyes see **two** targets, the hands are lost. The gun delivers the shots into space, somewhere a-r-o-u-n-d the targets.

The eyes must focus on **one** *target:* the first one you are going to shoot. And by now I have confidence that you have carefully chosen which target will be first, before you say "pull."

I like to start my lessons on single targets. Six minutes ago, Alice was five for five on the target from the left. Three minutes ago Alice was five for five on the target from the right. She's told a report pair is next. Now, Alice slides two, yes two, shells into her gun. Experience has taught me that my student has, just now, mentally changed gears. In her mind, she is now thinking these thoughts: 1.) there are now **two** targets coming, 2.) I have **two** shells in the gun, and 3.) I have to kill **two** targets.

The targets are launched as a report pair and, invariably, the shooter misses one or both targets. Why? Because Alice is now thinking about **two** targets instead of one.

I usually don't say anything and we shoot this report pair again, maybe twice more—with the same results. Taking a short break, we discuss, "How many targets are there in a pair?"

Although this is a pair, there aren't two targets coming. There's only one coming from the left. When it breaks there will be a single coming from the right. Also, though it's true there are two shells in the gun, when the bird from the left appears, how many shells fire when you pull the trigger? Right, one. Finally, you are not killing two targets. You kill the bird on the left. That's one. Then you kill the bird on the right. That's also one.

As you contemplate strategy, a pair should be considered two **singles.** Many times I hear, "but they're flying so close together, how can I see just one?" The answer is simple—discipline. You may see the second target peripherally, but it is critical that you focus on **one** target!

"So you want me to shoot them one at a time, right?" No. Listen to what you just said. You're still thinking in terms of *two.* Putting a hard focus on your first target is only half the job. When you say "pull," it is

imperative that you **think** in terms of **one** target. Many students already know they are supposed to look at only one target. That's good, but not good enough. On any pair, even a simultaneous pair, I believe you when you say you were looking at only one target. But that's only half the formula needed to break this pair consistently. How many targets were you thinking about?

The eyes guide the hands. If you are looking at two targets, the hands are lost. Thinking about two targets is just as harmful, as concentration on the first target can not be 100%.

When you pull the trigger, how many shells fire? One.

How many shells do you have remaining in the gun? One.

How many targets are there in a round of sporting clays? Think **one.** When you think in terms of two—or more—concentration is divided when it should be tightly focused. Wouldn't a tight, singular concentration on one target eliminate much of the pressure and other distractions in your game?

The thoughts and pictures you put into your mind, positive or negative, directly affect each shot.

So, how many targets are there in a pair?

You're right!

ANTICIPATING THE TARGET

The Third Checkpoint

Though F.I.T.A.S.C. will not permit the following, sporting clays competitors may presently use this recommendation.

By now we understand what time management means and why it is important. Through years of shooting, we taught ourselves to wait for the target to appear before we moved the gun. That's still a good policy for many presentations. However, for some other presentations, we can significantly improve time management on each target.

For many, anxiety is a common companion in the shooting box. After we say pull, a target that surprises us when it appears further builds this tension. Too often the shot is hurried. All of this is fertile ground for a soft focus, the hands going in an errant direction.

Here's another way to handle this.

The third of the four checkpoints is anticipating the target. The key component of this technique is timing.

Consider pushing your MHP further back, towards the trap and gently starting your gun mount prior to the target's appearance. Whether you can see the trap or not, learn to time the muzzle with the target's arrival at your intercept point. The target should **merge** with a gun that's already moving slightly, giving you a head start on the shot.

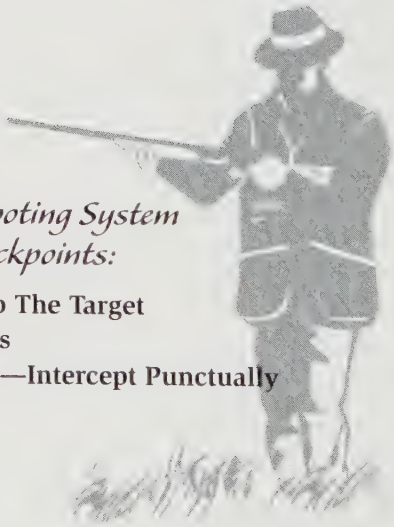
Anticipating the target's appearance and moving the muzzle to a place where the bird has yet to appear takes a little doing. What you learn through repetition is that your movement, when timed right, is rewarded by the appearance of the target exactly where and when you expected it to be there. It won't be long before you're starting your move to intercept a little early, and when the bird does appear, it's greeted by a moving gun that's locked on.

Consider this metaphorical example. You are driving your car down an entrance ramp onto the interstate at 5 p.m. rush hour. Traffic is moving at 70 mph. If you wait at the bottom of the ramp, stopped (waiting for the target to appear), the space (target) you need just went flying by. Instead, move down the ramp slowly (the gun mount starts), and then accelerate down the ramp to **merge** your car (gun) into your space (the intercept point, where the target will be).

Don't confuse your intercept point with your break point. Intercept the target first, then pull the trigger when the picture develops.

Good timing is essential and requires practice. As your hands begin to move they need a destination. Take your muzzle to *where the target will appear.* Both the muzzle and the target should arrive at the intercept point **at the same time.** The gun is now moving with the target; the remainder of the shot is short and simple.

When executed properly and coupled with **To The Target** and hard focus, students are startled by the ease of the shot. The panic is gone. It seems as though you now have twice as much time as you had before. Learning to anticipate allows you to relax because you know you will have more time available to execute the shot. A relaxed shooter is smooth (sneaky fast). By anticipating the target exactly on time, he provides himself with much improved time management and more control over the shot. Targets one and two are also killed at shorter distances from the muzzle.



Your Shooting System Checkpoints:

1. **Hands—To The Target**
2. **Hard Focus**
3. **Anticipate—Intercept Punctually**

BUILDING YOUR PICTURE INVENTORY

The Fourth Checkpoint

Images or sight-pictures are vital to consistently scoring well.

As your mental game begins to come on-line, it's now time to understand why *sight pictures* play such a vital role in the shooting equation. To shoot your very best scores, you should be accumulating a sizable mental inventory of sight pictures. Not only is the correct sight picture necessary to break the target, but you must soon program the correct picture for each target into your computer **before** you say pull.

Like Chapters 7, 9, and 11, this chapter is another cornerstone in building advanced skills. Much advanced shooting is built around sight pictures. To address this important subject, here is the article I wrote for an issue of Sporting Clays magazine.

With the outgoing mail clenched in your teeth, hot coffee balanced precariously in your left hand and the car key in your right, how many tries will it take to get the key into the ignition? My bet's placed on the first try. Did you have to bend your head and look to see where to put the key? Nope.

If blindfolded, could you put on your pants, shoes, shirt and sweater? No sweat. If you'll think back, there was a time when you couldn't. Learning plus long repetition builds confidence. Confidence allows the body to accomplish one thing while the mind is focused on something else.

So, you're telling me you already knew you could walk and chew gum at the same time. What does this have to do with shooting?

Building shooting skills is a lot like constructing a house. Before the roof goes on, you build the foundation. *Before* you ask yourself to consistently hit many of the targets on your favorite course, you must first learn and apply good shooting habits. This is the learning and repetition process. Only when your shooting fundamentals become automatic can shot execution be put on autopilot. Right here is where all that discipline and repetition begins to pay off.

We've worked on our setup, strategy, methods and equipment. The target is on its way. Now, for the first time, trusting the body to *automatically* do what it's been taught, you can begin to focus on skills that take you to the next level of performance.

More than a few of sporting clays' elite shooters say the most important part of the shooting equation is placing the muzzle in the **right** spot before pulling the trigger. Those of us who stay on the path to self-improvement inevitably reach this same conclusion. Whether your method is swing-through, maintained lead or the house special, the target will break only when the muzzle attains the correct spatial relationship with the target. Achieved accidentally or on purpose, when the muzzle and the target synchronize and the firing pin meets the primer, the target breaks.

Now, how best to achieve that visual target-muzzle relationship will be debated for a long, long time. And therein lies the very best of the sporting recipe.

To digress for a moment, past and future articles discuss how best to achieve these valuable sight pictures. This article also assumes that your shooting currently reflects easy repetition of the fundamentals. Finally, though I wish I could, I can't share these pictures with you here because the *right* picture will vary from student to student. The maintained lead enthusiast likely won't see the same target-muzzle relationship as the Churchill or swing-through shooter. The point being, you and your coach should know what picture you need to break this target consistently.

For now, let's examine why the pictures are so important.

Years back, watching my students ascend the learning curve, the concept of building an inventory of sporting clays target-muzzle relationships came to me. Skeet and trap shooters do this all the time. It's no secret that a specific sight picture will consistently break high-house one in skeet. To break each target from positions one through eight, reasonably speaking, there is a dependable and repeatable sight picture required. Having knowledge of those pictures is a decided advantage. Some of these experienced trap and skeet shooters can and do run hundreds of targets in competition without dropping a single bird.

The right sight picture delivers the "X."

Why don't we? Well, first, our target presentations are vastly more diversified than trap and skeet. We simply have a lot more and very different sight pictures than they do. Second, generally speaking and entertainment considerations aside, trap and skeet are more numbers games than sporting. Finally, for those of you in sporting who are score conscious, look at the HOA scores being posted. Slowly but surely, we are getting there.

If the pictures from each station were logged into memory, one could logically assume skeet to be an easy game. If only that were true. Lest we forget, each and every shot has to be executed without a mistake. In trap or skeet, just one lost target can be a disaster. Tournament jitters, emotional pressures to perform well, concentration lapses, weather and dozens of other forces outside our control eventually contribute to that inevitable missed target. Like trap and skeet, sporting is a game of knowledge, discipline and, finally, trusting what you know.

No one said it would be easy. Studying sight pictures, however, is time well spent. For instance, George Digweed is making his place among top international shooters in sporting. In his book, he refers to an inventory of sight pictures this way. For every target presentation, there is a proper target-muzzle relationship that will result in a break. That picture is then deposited in your mental bank. Each picture learned is a deposit. As you traverse the course during a tournament, every time you step into the shooting box, you make a withdrawal from that account. As you examine the next presentation, should you find yourself with more questions than answers, it's probably because you depleted your deposits. I see this as another vote supporting my perspective that good shooting instincts alone leave you with limited ability. Adding knowledge keeps you moving up the learning curve.

Many factors affect which picture you need to consistently break a particular clay. Distance from the muzzle; target speed; muzzle speed; type of target; terrain and background; target elevation; flight path, angle, drop or height; available light, and other conditions—all affect the picture you need. Though these variables can complicate an accurate diagnosis of the

presentation before you step into the box, learning sight pictures greatly helps to simplify the shooting equation.

As we all know, there are three basic target directions: crossing, incoming and outgoing. True, the course designer can modify speed, distance, angles and terrain to confuse us, but the three basic target directions remain a constant.

Let's start with a common left-to-right crossing standard at 20 yards. With speeds of slow, moderate and fast, we'll give this presentation a moderate pace. Regardless of which strategy and method you prefer, there is a target-muzzle picture that, when achieved, will break this target every time. **Learning and remembering this combination of target size, distance, speed and picture, gives you a formula with which you can dependably break this target, both now and later.** Step-by-step, we're eliminating guesswork from the shooting equation.

Moving this same presentation to 30 yards, here is the question. Is the correct sight picture the same as the one at 20 yards? If you don't know, it would benefit you to learn the answer.

Moving back another 10 yards puts the target at 40 yards. To break this target consistently, you must know if the picture has changed. If a sight picture change has occurred, are you applying the change to the shot? What about the 50 yard target?

Eventually the picture will change, if only slightly. Here are some thoughts on those changes.

Forward allowance, the visual picture of the muzzle and the target, can be seen in terms of spatial relationships, or windows. That spatial relationship can change depending on the presentation. **Your mission before going into the box is to know which picture is required for each target and how to get the muzzle into the right place, efficiently and consistently.**

If you remember, I'm opposed to measuring leads in sporting clays. When it comes to forward allowances I prefer small, medium and large windows. Not being overly precise keeps your eye focused on the target and the gun moving. If you deliberately try to measure the forward allowance, almost invariably the gun will decelerate just when gun speed becomes critical to the shot. The computer between your ears can easily compensate for any precision needed and will *automatically adjust the sight picture much faster than you can.* Remember how easily the car key went into the ignition? Put the mechanics of the shot on autopilot. Your coach has shown you the picture. Right here, as the muzzle is flowing to the target, *it is imperative that you trust yourself.* With tunnel vision you are singularly focused on achieving the picture that will break this target!

Changing the presentation above to a quartering target requires a new picture. The degree of angle on a quartering bird can change the spatial relationship rather drastically. Once again, to improve your skills, it's crucial that you learn what these pictures are as the angle, and possibly the distance, changes.

True, there are endless combinations of target sizes, speeds, distances and angles. How can we possibly learn all the necessary sight pictures or target-muzzle relationships?

OK, it's a challenge. But remember, there are only three basic target directions. A quartering target is still just a quartering target whether it's relatively flat, rising, sliding downhill or below your feet. Provided your muzzle doesn't lose the target "line" (flight path) a few clear pictures should keep you in business from 15 to 50 yards. You can get some serious mileage out of those quartering pictures on any given course.

The same is true for crossing targets. Pictures should only change slightly as distances increase. The exception, depending upon shooting method, might be targets beyond 50 yards. Learning and retaining these pictures will dependably cover you from the shortest to longer ranges.

Now that we're getting a handle on the distance factor, what happens when the target speed goes from moderate to fast, or the opposite? Won't we have to learn a whole new set of pictures? Generally speaking, the answer is no, provided your gun speed is appropriate. To have the *right* gun speed, the muzzle must be in harmony with the target. It is because swing-through shooters first slide in behind then pull the trigger as they accelerate through a target that many of their pictures look the same. The successful maintained lead shooter also sees very similar pictures at various distances, provided gun speed visually matches the target. *Aligning gun speed to target speed, slow through fast, has a tendency to equalize sight pictures.*

Our brain is quite competent when it comes to remembering. A 30-yard teal that has peaked and started to fall has a very distinct feel and picture. Though concentration is mandatory, provided your computer knows the picture, all you need to kill this target is a little discipline. By knowing the sight-picture in advance, your move to the target is confident and (here's the key word) **deliberate.**

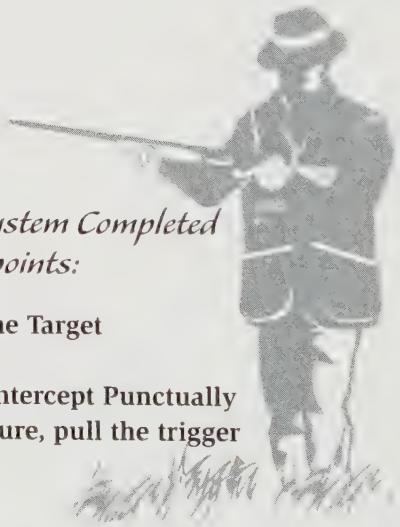
Like every other new skill, the learning curve in sporting clays is a series of building blocks. With the basics and a smooth, efficient gun mount firmly in place, you can now give your full attention to the target and the right picture. Repetition under the watchful eye of your instructor puts your gun in the correct place. *Once learned and filed away, that presenta-*

tion and sight picture combination can be called upon at will. It won't matter if you're in Brazil, England or San Antonio at the Nationals, a 35-yard crossing "picture" will look the same in any of these locations. Once learned, the pictures that work for you on battues can be applied anywhere you choose to travel and compete. The quartering rabbit-muzzle relationship that worked so well for you in Kansas will be just as deadly in New Jersey. Pictures—dependable pictures that you've mastered and put into your inventory—won't let you down.

I believe there are two possible causes for struggling with a target. First, our shooter may need further work on the fundamentals. Or second, shot execution is sound, but he or she may not know the correct picture.

Use your imagination and tell me—can you think of a difficult target?

I propose to you that there are no difficult targets, only targets that you don't yet know how to break. Assuming your mechanical skills are up to the chase, only the picture remains. Give me a student with rock solid shooting basics and I'll supply the picture. Gun closed and student focused, this target is dead before it leaves the trap.



Your Shooting System Completed Checkpoints:

1. **Hands—To The Target**
2. **Hard Focus**
3. **Anticipate—Intercept Punctually**
4. **Build the picture, pull the trigger**

YOUR PICTURE INVENTORY:

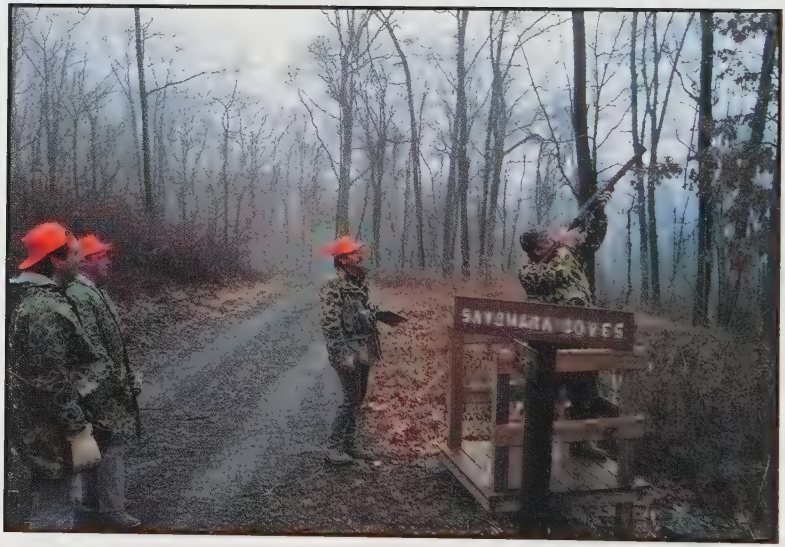
WHAT IS IT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

A sight picture is the visual, spatial relationship between the gun muzzle and the target.

When the sight picture is correct and the trigger is pulled, the target will break.

Learning and retaining sight pictures minimizes confusion and guesswork.

Sight pictures are an integral part of rehearsal imaging and your mental game.



Trusting what you've learned.

Section III

THE MENTAL GAME

Moving the hands To The Target.

SPORTING CLAYS—THE ART & SCIENCE

Well, I gotta tell you, it's good to finally meet you here. If you've had fun shooting a shotgun before, wait 'til you see this work. You're coming into a wonderful stage of shotgunning. This is just about as good as it gets—and it's great.

Step-by-step, building block by building block, we've been working diligently and tenaciously to get to this stage. To gain entry at this level it is vital that you know how to do the following, **automatically,** shot after shot:

1. Hands to the target—with a punctual intercept.
2. Hard focus.
3. Know the pictures for the basic presentations at reasonable distances—*before* you say "pull."

At this stage, our setup is fading into the background. It's still being completed, but by now it takes only a few seconds to finish and our full attention is on more important matters in front of us. In essence, we're trusting our experience to complete the *scientific* aspects of the shot and beginning to focus on the **art** of shooting. The following article I wrote for *Sporting Clays*, lays the foundation for our next step up the ladder.

How important is this? It is the heart of Book III and your path to the best scores you've ever shot.

How many times have we seen this? When the quail bolts from its cover, behind us and without warning, there is little time to do anything but react. The muzzles blur to a puff of feathers; the dog is given the command to fetch. How did we do that?

Then there's the target that leaves at Mach 1. The stock snags on your shirt during the mount and you have no choice but to pull the trigger—right now—or take a lost bird. Much to your surprise, the bird crumbles.

If you stop and think about it, what we accomplish with a shotgun is just short of amazing.

Is wingshooting, or the ability to break a target consistently, an art or

a science? Is it both? The answer to this question goes to the very heart of your ability to hit a moving target, whether it be feather or clay.

A clay rabbit is about four inches in diameter. Held in your hand, it doesn't look so formidable. Launch it from a red spring Lincoln, and this shot-resistant target turns into a bullet. Add an unpredictable bounce or dive and you've got a target that deserves your serious attention. Yet, with the gun in capable hands, one rabbit after another is ground into dust. What exactly broke that rabbit? Carefully open a shell sometime and pour the shot into your palm. Though it looks pitifully incapable of breaking anything, it does, and quite handily, as we can all attest.

Since we already know a sufficient number of #8 shot will demolish a speeding midi, and the gun and shell can deliver the shot to a destination, it appears the rest of the shot process is up to us. If this is true, and it most certainly is, we are left with the task of giving *direction* to that shot string. In addition to giving it direction, we must also ensure that the target and the shot string arrive at the same place, at the same time.

Accomplishing this task with machine-like consistency is the goal of every serious clay target competitor. The questions is, *how?*

There are books, tapes, videos, instruction and other resources to provide these answers, and we learn from listening, reading, watching, doing, and all the feedback that provides. Whether the task is simple or complex, there is most likely a set of directions and steps that, when put together in the right order, makes the task simpler to understand and easier to perform. These mechanical applications could be considered the *science* of shooting.

The two shots mentioned earlier, however, didn't require a calculator or slide rule to bring down their targets. Would it be fair to say that what the gunners did with their shotguns wasn't a science, but an *art?*

When we examine how much of shotgunning is an art or a science, strong opinions surface on both sides. Let's consider the scientific aspect, what science contributes to the shooting equation, and why the art of shooting is equally, if not more important.

Take riding a bicycle for example. As a youngster, we walked up to the bike and put our hands on the handlebars. With training wheels in place, we quickly learned where to put our feet, how to pedal, how to steer, and sometimes, how to stop on purpose. Our new mode of transportation was exhilarating. With brothers, sisters and furry critters scrambling out of our way, all we had to do was pedal and steer, pedal and steer. This two-step operation was pretty much a science.

Then one day we looked down and the training wheels were gone.

Something new had been added to the equation: balance. If you recall, the first few short journeys down the driveway were actually more about the absence of balance. Remembering to pedal and steer, balance disrupted our ability to get from point A to point B. Finally, we began to focus on balance, assigning another part of our body to attend to pedal and steer. Little by little, the third component coordinated with the first two and a smooth, less calamitous ride resulted. This is the art of bicycle riding. As you accumulated experience, your subconscious mind gradually connected each step with another. The task became easier, and you attempted and accomplished challenging maneuvers.

Are pedaling, steering and balance the science of bicycling, and the automatic, subconscious combining of the three the art? If so, then our science would include strategies, setup, barrel lengths, chokes, stock dimensions, loads, ballistics and related components. If some of shooting is an art—and we know that it has to be, where does the science end and the art begin?

I can hear you asking: Should this matter to us as shooters? Absolutely.

In the bicycling example, each individual part of the equation has its place in making the process work. Take out any one part and you're no longer riding a bicycle. The *art* of riding a bicycle occurs when the training wheels are removed and all the parts are smoothly coordinated.

Similarly, the shooting equation is composed of different parts. When they meld, the process flows.

Developing a strategy and an advantageous setup prepares you for the shot. Smart choices are made relative to equipment. A smooth, well-directed gun mount gets you to the target both quickly and efficiently. Visual focus on the target is essential. Sight pictures, or target-muzzle relationships, are known and readied.

The target, however, is still on the trap waiting for launch. All preparations complete, sooner or later you must take the shot. Here is where the science ends and the art begins. When the targets do appear, and your instinctive flow to the targets is obstructed by mental calculations and manual override, chances are good you will miss the targets. **Calculations and mechanics do have their value, but, when given your attention during the shot, they decisively inhibit your natural ability to hit a moving target.**

As the experienced competitor moves steadily to higher levels of ability, more and more of the shooting equation becomes automatic, allowing our shooter to focus tightly on more singular objectives. Less and

less attention is given to shooting method and forward allowance, and more attention is given to *trusting* the body and equipment to complete the task successfully.

The early learning stages of any task are difficult because your conscious mind can only focus on one part of the task at a time. To see what I mean, pick up three oranges and start juggling. Repetition eventually begins to show you the way because your subconscious mind learns and takes over one part of the task after another.

In spite of the fact that your subconscious can handle most if not all of your shooting, depending upon skill level, most shooters execute each shot with their conscious mind. Rather than trust our natural ability, we want to "help" the body complete the shot. Here is what this shot looks like. See the target, now move the gun. Then, visually insert the muzzle on the bird. Start your pull away. Now, look for the correct forward allowance. Pull the trigger. Last, don't forget to follow through. Sporting clays targets won't give us this kind of time.

Knowing what to do and doing it are quite different. Though it's true that you should have a rudimentary understanding of shooting mechanics, **once the target is in the air, your mind should be absolutely clear. It's time to shoot, not think. 100% of the shot should be left to the experience you've gained and your natural ability.** Any physical attempt to "help" your computer complete the shot instantly hampers your natural flow to the target.

Time and again I have a student in front of me who's repeatedly shown me he is capable of performing well above what he believes to be his skill level. So why do we have multiple missed targets? My student is aiming and tracking instead of trusting his instincts and true ability. I call this paralysis due to analysis. Rather than trusting all the experience gained from countless other shots, he wants to *help* his natural skills kill this bird. Giving the conscious mind one task after another *during* the shot, he is making the shot more difficult than it really is.

I explain to this person that he has a very competent shooter inside him. So I ask him to step aside and let this person out. Huh? The skepticism in the air is almost palpable. To convince him, I ask him to *completely* trust his natural ability to point at a moving object. To do this, *he must give himself permission to miss and not pass judgement after the shot.* Sensing that his commitment to the plan is sincere, I give him a series of targets and very little time to shoot. Like the quail that surprised us, the eyes and hands snap to each target. At the sound of each shot, much to his surprise, the target breaks again and again.

All of the math, diagrams, speed and distance calculations, stock dimensions, choke and shot size selections, methods and other important data will never equal your brain's ability to more rapidly calculate, process and execute what you must do to break a moving target. If higher scores are a goal, sooner or later you must put gun mount, visual focus, forward allowance and other factors on autopilot, allowing you simply to trust yourself to break the target. Yes, you must first learn how to do these things (move, mount, shooting method, forward allowance, sight pictures and follow through) before you are able to do them without thinking about them. To ascend to the next skill level, however, the doing part must eventually become automatic.

You can't play a piano concerto if you don't know the scale. Likewise, preparing to shoot well will always be to your advantage. I read and hear how knowledge of the above only serves to complicate the shot and invariably confuses the shooter. Actually, learning and applying sound fundamentals makes shooting easier, not more difficult. The shooter who feels lost and confused is the shooter who lacks knowledge and technique. For this person, knowing what to do and how to do it will more than likely be a complete mystery. Contrast this to the knowledgeable shooter who prepares his equipment accordingly and steps into the box, totally confident and focused.

Learning the fundamentals provides you with a solid foundation on which to build a complete game. In the early stages of shooting, the learning curve provides the proper understanding and assembling of each part of the shooting equation. These components are important. Breaking targets consistently, however, has less to do with shooting mechanics and equipment, and more to do with trusting. That is the *art* of wingshooting!

So, rather than force your body through each step of the shot, maybe you could let the shooter inside you start the best long run you've ever had.

SHOOTING

THE SCIENCE:

- Gun Fit
- Chokes and Loads—Equipment
- Strategy and Setup
- Gun Mount and Sight Pictures

THE ART:

- **Clear your mind**
- **What to do:**

Trust your body to use the experience you've given it.
Trust your mind to use what it's been taught.
Trust your eyes and hands to move the gun accurately.
Trust your computer to make the proper forward allowance calculations.
Trust that experience will tell you when to pull the trigger.

TURNING THE COMPUTER ON

Because it's intangible, most folks don't feel the mental game is worth their serious time or attention. So, realistically, in terms of generating results, can the mental side of shooting prove its worth where it counts—in the shooting box? The answer is an unconditional yes.

As stated earlier in this book, there are three basic components to the shooting game. The first is our natural ability to point at a moving target accurately, referred to as eye-hand coordination. Second is the knowledge of the many techniques and methods that comprise the middle rungs on the ladder of skills in our sport. Third is the mental game; it acts like a computer that connects and coordinates the first two, creating a more natural, less mechanical performance. Like the proverbial chain, however, the strength of that performance can only be as strong as the weakest component.

Your mental game helps you with tournament jitters, a shooting slump, and consistency on your score sheet. It also substantially fortifies your confidence when and where it counts the most, in the shooter's box.

Here are the basics of the mental game and how you can begin to apply them productively in your shooting routine.

Can your mind influence your performance? Definitely. Your body is only a tool with which things get done. Instructions and directions that guide this tool come from the computer between your ears. What you do, where you go, how you get there, and how you feel about all of this is determined by the mind. The mind has the power to control.

How much control?

On a bet, here's a quartering midi presentation. It's quick, tricky, downhill, flashing through the trees. You can break it. You've shown us that you can, many times. Now, here's **one** shell, for **one** target. Break it and I'll give you $10,000, no questions asked. Miss it, however, and you write out a check to me for $2,500.

One target. $10,000 can pay off the truck and some bills. The bet is on.

Your wife and daughter stand in the crowd, watching. The silence thunders in your ears. Gun closed, you study the target flight path. Were there always that many trees out there? Should you break it in the first

window where it's faster but closer, or in the second where it's slowing down, but further away? What if you try to anticipate the launch and then get a slow pull? Will the wind push it down today? Does your heart always beat this fast?

Try as you might to feel confident, doubts are creeping into your game plan. Caution is knocking at the door loudly. A little voice in your head whispers, "Be careful, don't miss." Finally, it's time, and "there goes" the target. It sure *seems* faster than it did before. In a millisecond you see the right picture, check to make sure and pull the trigger. At the report, we watch the target glide safely into the deep woods.

Pressure created by the mind is a powerful, dominating force. That's the power of the mind over the body. The example above shows how the body reacts to cautions, doubts and similar thoughts, each leading you away from the successful shot. **However, just as the body can be influenced by negative thoughts, it can be just as easily and equally motivated by positive thinking.**

How many times have you walked towards a particular field, convinced the upcoming targets would be difficult? By doing so, although unintentionally, you've just laid the foundation for missing these targets.

Students have told me they can't hit rabbits, teal or the like as we approached that field. These negative thoughts almost guarantee failure in the box. To counter this, before we reach the field I explain to them that there are no difficult targets. There are targets you may not know how to hit, but that will change dramatically in a few minutes. To my student's amazement, when the technique is applied correctly, they center target after target.

When the student trusts the coach and himself, he hits 70 to 90 percent of the targets on this field. Though my student may be shaken by the ease at which these targets broke, I'm not. I've seen this happen many times and I know the methods work. Anyone who applies them correctly will break the target. As the coach, I am more concerned with the mental resistance this person has built up towards this target. When the method is understood and applied, here's what happens:

1. Apprehension is replaced by a solid, relaxed confidence.
2. The word "difficult" no longer applies.
3. Technique is trusted over doubts and trying too hard.

Why does this take place? Because the previous mystery surrounding the shot has been exchanged for a solid shooting system that works—consistently! Knowledge and confidence have replaced the fear caused by the unknown.

Now you know that simply pointing a shotgun towards a moving target should give you some success. Natural instincts do most of the work and are reasonably dependable until more challenging targets come onto the menu. Here's where the learning curve quickly flattens out. Taking some lessons and putting a few thousand rounds behind you will probably move you up to the next plateau. This is where many folks stay, season after season.

If target count remains a high priority, taking continued instruction almost becomes a necessity. This rejuvenates and accelerates the learning process, and expands your inventory of knowledge of the many shot presentations you will face.

As you build that knowledge inventory, and your scores go up, additional forces and emotions begin to influence your performance. To make respectable scores climb even higher, fewer mistakes are allowed. As the targets cross, dive and dodge, success requires a clear mind, sustained focus, and confidence based on ability you trust.

Tournament jitters ($10,000 for one target), work and family issues, peer pressure and many other factors can split your concentration. The strain of maintaining a long run will test your poise with every pull of the trigger.

Learn the fundamentals and make them an integral part of your game because **the mental game cannot compensate for the absence of knowledge and failure to execute properly.**

Think, and practice trust. Our ultimate goal here is to put 100% of your concentration on the "doing," not on the how.

Here is a simple, effective path to developing a solid mental game. Let's start on Field One. Assuming reasonable competence on this particular sporting clays field, your confidence comes from the knowledge that you: 1.) know **what** to do, 2.) **can** do it, 3.) can do it **consistently,** and 4.) **will** do it.

Let's do that again in shooting terms. First you have a strategy. When completed, you now know **what** to do (that's 1). Stepping into the box, you have no doubts that you **can** break these targets (that's 2). Long practice sessions have given you the confidence to break them **today** (that's 3). Adjusting your feet, closing the gun and looking back, you know that you **will,** with purpose and deliberation, break these targets (that's 4).

It isn't long before you begin to see which targets you can hit and with which ones you have difficulty with. The targets you can consistently hit are put into a mental inventory. The larger this inventory becomes, the more you can **trust** your physical game and begin to focus on the mental

game. **With guidance and perseverance, our objective has been to gradually build a sizable inventory of targets that you can hit every day, and a solid mechanical game that you can trust.** On any given day, throw a target in your inventory and chances are very good that you can break it right now, without struggling.

Now let's put the mechanical tasks on auto-pilot and trust the body to do what it has learned, without your help.

The following are to be done automatically, without manual help from you:

1.) Hands To The Target

2.) Hard focus on the target

3.) Go to the picture you know is right for a break

Now it's time to shoot.

Field One throws a left-to-right rabbit at about 18 yards, followed by a mid-range, right-to-left battue on report, both of which are in your inventory. Most people begin their work once the first target appears. We're going to approach this trip into the box very differently. A careful review of what the targets are doing gives us a strategy. Stepping into the box, homework done, you're almost ready to call for the target.

Whereas most people are simply trying to break the targets (confusing the result with the task), you are concentrating on what must be done to break each target, starting only with target one.

You've seen this rabbit many times and you know, precisely, what must be done to break it. So, with tunnel vision, putting everything else out of your mind, the goal here will be to trust the body to go through each step without a single mistake.

Again, here is what you are trusting:

1. Hands To The Target
2. Hard focus
3. The right picture to form

Any effort manually to override, adjust, fix, aim or correct the shot after the target appears will impede the shot. Though you can feel and watch the shot take place, everything happens automatically, taking you to one and only one thought on the *first* target: get the right picture and pull the trigger.

With your setup correct and finished, you say "pull." Right on schedule the rabbit appears. Your hands move *automatically,* to the rabbit **merging** with the muzzle. The stock touches your cheek. The picture is perfect; you pull the trigger and the rabbit vanishes. After a small

dismount, moving deliberately and without panic, your eyes and the gun come up and to the right. Your eyes are looking *directly* at the spot where the battue will appear and the muzzle waits patiently behind the intercept point. There's no need to rush here. Like you knew it would, the battue appears. Your hands, with precise direction, move smoothly *left* as the target begins its gentle turn. Even before the stock reaches your cheek, your fore-end hand is opening the window. Mount finished, the picture's perfect. At the sound of the shot, a split second later we watch the target blossom into a black cloud.

If you read that paragraph again, you won't find anything in there about *trying* to break the target. There's no mention of score, determination, success, failure, prizes or peers. With laser beam intensity, we gave our full attention to the single thought in our mind, for each target, and trusted ourselves to go through each step, on each target, without a single mistake.

From experience, your computer knew the right sight picture for each target and how to arrive there punctually. You trusted your body to accomplish this and when the right picture appeared, you pulled the trigger. The instructions to your computer were simple and easily understood. **Get to the right picture and fire.** Your mind and body knew how to do that—on each target—smoothly, efficiently, and without mistakes. Because you didn't interfere with the shot and trusted yourself to complete it, you broke each target.

All of this can be easier to understand than to do, especially under tournament conditions.

Naturally, my student wants to break this target. Score is important, so he or she *needs* to break this target. This leads to "trying to break the target." Unfortunately, "trying" builds tension, tightens muscles, and slows the gun down because our shooter is now being careful, measuring or aiming.

So how do we stop "trying"? We don't stop. We redirect those energies into one, single, solitary task. Get to the right picture and fire.

When I ask my students to "divorce themselves from the target," they look at me like I've just grown a third eye in my forehead. What I'm asking them to do is to trust the experience and ability they've gained and leave "breaking the target" out of the equation. Breaking the target is the result of what you've done, not what you do. You are concentrating on achieving the right picture and the trigger pull, not breaking the target.

You've already learned the steps for each shot and you know how to break these targets. You've broken them both many times and can do it

again right now. Here's what's different. Now it's time to get out of the way, and **trust** yourself to execute the shot without mistakes. Instead of trying to break the targets, we are focused on putting the shot string where it belongs. With a hard focus on each target, each shot goes off in slow motion. Your hands automatically seek out the first and second target. Punctually and without forcing it, the right picture appears both times. Done properly, our student will tell you he knew, before the trigger was pulled, each target would break.

First, we learn what to trust, then we trust what we've learned. The key here is your willingness to trust what you've learned.

A target is hit or missed depending upon what takes place in the box. Blind, teeth grinding determination is useless. Determination used wisely can be an asset.

The ability to concentrate need not be a fragile or part-time component of your shooting. Concentration is merely your ability to hold an image, thought, picture or word. Holding the positive thought or picture you loaded into the computer requires discipline. Here is where determination helps. Use it to keep you focused. Complete those instructions, without a mistake, and you will break this target. This is the path to breaking one target after another.

How can a skeet shooter break 25 straight? Then reach 100 straight? And finally 400 straight? It's done with three basic components, each dependent upon the other for these impressive long runs. The first is learning **what** to do. He or she must know every single move and sight picture for each target at all eight stations. There is an exact formula to be followed, at each position, for each target. Second is **learning how** to do each step. Then, when the setup, gun movement and sight picture is right for each position and target at that position, the target's crushed. Third, knowing what to do and how to do it isn't enough. The target won't give you extra time to "help" the shot. The shooter must **trust** what he or she has learned. The successful shooter trusts his or her formula, going through each step automatically, precisely and without mistakes, for every single target.

To summarize:

1.) Know what to do.

2.) Know how to do it.

3.) Concentrate (Load the computer with instructions or a picture).

4.) **Trust** yourself to do it.

Good fortune shined on me and I broke 93 of 100 winning a tournament that, for personal reasons, was important to me. By trusting my

knowledge and experience I broke 93 targets without trying to break anything. Win or lose, my game plan was simple: trust myself; get to the picture I knew would be right; pull the trigger. I took the risk, and no, it wasn't easy. Quite honestly, field after field, the gun seemed to guide itself, and I knew the birds were going to break before I pulled the trigger.

Later, at a tournament in New Jersey, I got caught up in my expectations and shot a mediocre first round. I didn't trust myself, and every shot felt forced. Assessing the first round brought my mistakes to the surface. My strategy on the second round would be different. Focusing intently on what I needed to do and trusting myself, I was straight as I walked to the next-to-last field and finished HOA.

It takes time to learn to let go, trust yourself completely, and watch the targets break. After awhile though, one broken target after another begins to eliminate doubts. The more you trust your knowledge and experience, long runs grow steadily longer! When these techniques are applied properly, the adrenaline rush is absolutely exhilarating, making you deadly effective as well as pushing you towards your full potential.

Book III will address this subject in greater detail, but learning to trust the skills you've worked so hard to gain is the heart of the mental game.

Section IV

PRESENTATIONS: NEUTRALIZING THE TARGET'S DEFENSE

CHAPTER 15

IS WHAT YOU SEE WHAT YOU GET?

First-time shooters enjoy this sport for many reasons. The targets are new and exciting. Rabbits, minis, battues stir the adreneline when seen for the first time. We more experienced shooters crave different and more challenging presentations. And, we've learned only too well that targets don't have to be far or fast to have us grumbling when we come out of the box.

As a course designer, the challenge and enjoyment for me comes from creating a presentation that *looks* simple to everyone. When faced with a simple presentation, the shooter's approach to the targets might be a little casual, and more often than not he takes the targets for granted. Our shooter's facial expression going into the box, however, might not be the same as the one coming out. As I said, the presentation looks simple. And here you think I'm going to tell you it's not. Actually, it is. That is, *if* you know what the targets are really doing.

The deceptive target presentation is one of the best parts of sporting clays. What you see is not always what you get.

Especially with a deceptive presentation, what you do out of the box can be just as important as what you do in the box. If your *strategy* is wrong, you're making preparations to jump off the wrong end of the diving board.

Without accurate target analysis and preparation, gun skills alone will be sorely handicapped when the targets do appear. Here are some pointers on developing a strategy to handle that deceptive, frustrating, but very fair target.

1. Before going into the box, examine the presentation carefully to develop your strategy. Gun in the rack, stand behind and to one side of the shooter in the box. When the targets appear, move your hands and mentally go through each shot. This applies to singles and doubles. By going through the motions, you'll discover whether or not your strategy is working, and which target to shoot first.
2. Your analysis outside the box may determine your performance on this Field. For instance, a simultaneous pair from different directions requires careful consideration. Often, one target is slower or closer, making it the most appealing for your first shot. Be

careful here. What is the other bird doing? As you discovered during your rehearsal, it's now at 40 yards and gaining ground!

3. Every fair pair has a simpler and a more difficult approach. So, which bird is first? To answer this question, ask yourself which target will be the hardest for you. If time allows, kill the most difficult bird first before it becomes almost impossible to hit.
4. Which target gives you the most and least amount of time? If one target gives you very little time, it just became your first target. Maybe it's the fastest or the one that's about to disappear or go out of range, or land quickly right in front of you. Naturally, in choosing which bird to kill first, you must always allow enough time to kill bird number two. If you leave this bird for your second shot, your reward may be an unpleasant surprise. By rehearsing the shot outside the box, you can unravel the deception before stepping into the box.
5. This brings us to what I call the "risk-reward equation." Naturally, your objective is to try to minimize the risks in the presentation and maximize the reward by developing the right strategy and set-up. Put your targets in the right sequence and in the "best" possible break points. The objective of your setup should be to neutralize the target's advantage, which is also its defense. Work hard to uncover exactly what the clays are doing.

Deception can come from many parts of the presentation. The most common deceptions are speed, target size and distance. Here's another: angle. A relatively easy target that's rarely hit is usually missed because of something no one has noticed. Quite often it's the angle of flight. Here is a clear, common example.

You're standing on the side of a hill. Look to your left, the hill goes up. Look to your right, the hill goes down. The grade in front of you slopes gently downward from left to right. A simultaneous pair is launched above on your left, crosses in front of you, and proceeds away from the hill to your right. From experience, I can see what the competitor in front of me can't. Each miss on the second target has been high. Why? Because the natural tendency of the body on this presentation is to create a left to right, **flat** swing. This provides an X on the first target. By now, however, the second bird is dropping, and not by accident. The result is a miss over the top on the second bird. The presentation was set up that way. The drop may be difficult to detect, but it's there and costing folks targets. Our shooter failed to notice this and is holding a flat swing through **both** targets. Sometimes, even when our shooter knows to adjust for the drop on target #2, the body

resists the necessary downward motion. All of this, plus the position of the shooting box and the presentation, lures the competitor into a long flat swing. The drop on this second target may appear subtle. If you could see it from the trapper's chair, you wouldn't believe how fast it's dropping.

When your swing drifts off the target flight path, you've "lost the line." A flat swing will eventually lose the downward flight path on this second target, and continue onward (as the target drops *away*), delivering the shot *over* the target. Only when the swing is adjusted downward and *holds the true target line* (**To The Target**) will the target break. Losing the line is common on many climbing, sliding or dropping presentations, causing one miss after another. On every presentation, especially as a competitor, you need to watch that line.

Target speed doesn't always mean fast. Recently, some of our best presentations have been the really slow rollers and droppers. Watch your muzzle speed here. Slow down and focus hard. Remember: slow bird, slow gun; faster bird, faster gun (not a faster mount—slow everything down, including the target).

If it's a straightforward presentation, don't look for angles that aren't there. Grind them up and get out of there. If the people ahead of you are having difficulty, watch those targets carefully. Especially on deceptive targets, gun skills alone aren't always enough to get the job done. Discovering why everyone else is missing is half the fun of this game, and definitely to your advantage. With that knowledge, you can develop a strategy to execute these targets, one at a time, confidently and **on purpose.**

CHAPTER 16

UP OR DOWN, IT DOESN'T MATTER WE'RE ON IT!

As targets race to hither and yon—diving, curving, hopping—attempting to deceive us; we need every advantage to keep those X's coming.

Going **To The Target** automatically moves your gun in the direction the target's taking, precisely and on time. With a hard focus, you're not "around" the target. You're already on the target, staying with it, as the gun glides smoothly into the right picture.

Most dropping birds are missed with a dead gun, which is a gun that's stopped moving. After a spot is picked below the target, everything stops except the target, and the trigger is pulled. The culprit here is lack of gun movement, or aiming. Nine times out of ten, the target's missed over the top. Instead, taking the hands **To The Target** keeps the gun moving *with* the bird.

Excluding battues, some shondells and targets launched downhill, most dropping targets are not moving at high speed. Most fall at slow to medium speeds. Why is this important? Match your gun speed to the target's speed. *Slow and deliberate* will get the job done nicely on most dropping targets. Don't pick up the pace in your movement unless the target warrants it. Moving quickly on a slow dropper can put you out of control. I like maintained lead on dropping targets, especially those that are slow, regardless of their direction. Maintained lead allows a nice pace, and any adjustments to the sight picture are easy to make.

Here's an alternate method. It's a point and shoot proposition. As the bird settles, with most or all tricks out of the flight path, push both hands to the break point as the gun slides into the shoulder pocket. This forward delivery of the gun builds in direction and prevents the gun from stopping, avoiding a miss over the top.

For a medium to low incoming dropper, during the mount, approach the target from slightly *underneath.* We call this, "approaching from the belly up." Building the window under the target happens naturally. Maintaining our six o'clock hold, we know the target is about to break even before we pull the trigger. Keep "the pumpkin on the post" and don't allow the clay to fall below the gun. "Keeping the window open" as you squeeze the trigger builds the follow through into your swing.

From high to screaming low trap presentations, the rising and/or going away target need not be as difficult as it seems. Whether you come up from behind the target and swing-through, or start with an MHP that makes the target chase you, *let the target steer your muzzle.*

Whereas many folks have a lower MHP here and prefer to chase and come through this target, I often recommend a slightly higher MHP. When the bird appears and the hands begin to move, you should find yourself slightly in front of the target, basically letting the clay chase you. This sustained lead is most appropriate. Your hands are fine tuning the window (forward allowance) as the target is pushing the muzzle. When the stock touches your cheek, there should be few or no remaining adjustments.

On an overhead going away, establish a *sustained lead* as you intercept, and keep that picture when the stock settles in. Holding that window open *under* the bird, you're finished, so pull the trigger. Your work on the first target is done. Move to bird two. Get a similar picture and fire. Because this bird may have already started to fall, further delays on the trigger pull can be costly. When your hands intercept that overhead clay and you feel the stock make contact with your cheek, the six o'clock picture you want should be complete. The benefits in a pair are that target's one and two are broken at shorter ranges.

As always, strategy is paramount. Knowing which bird you intend to take first ensures that each shot can go off as planned. That planning gives you good time management and control over each shot, keeping proper timing and flow intact.

What about teal?

Teal can be tricky. Just as you hit maximum acceleration going up, they're slowing down. You have to feel your way through the shot and trust yourself to pull the trigger when it seems right. Know where your targets are going and trust your instincts. Briefly:

1. If you're going to shoot this teal going up, start with a higher MHP. As the teal approaches the underside of your gun, accelerate away and *pull the trigger—no delays.*

2. If the teal is stopped at the top or about to stop, give it a six o'clock hold and shoot.
3. Once the teal starts down it begins to accelerate, so get under it and get the shot on its way *now.*
4. Taking the shot going up or down requires follow through. Without it, you're aiming or measuring. Don't—trust the shot and pull the trigger!

If your teal game is strong, don't fool with it. If not, the preceding will help. Also, if you haven't tried teal from the gun-up position, you should. It's an alternate method. Some feel it's faster, offers greater control and simplifies the whole gun mount and shot execution process.

Most people undershoot a fast riser and overshoot a dropping teal. If you are really struggling, your instructor can help you further with this target.

When a target appears, regardless of speed or direction, the more precise you are with your hand movements the easier the shot becomes. You can quickly put the targets that rise or fall under control when the hands find the target, its line and speed. Once you lock on, get your picture and *pull the trigger.* Fussing with the first target causes the sight picture to erode and is costing you precious time on the second clay.

Looking over your shoulder as you walk towards Field One at The Warrington Club.

CHAPTER 17

YOU CAN'T BREAK BATTUES BY BEING BEHIND

It's not uncommon to hear people coming out of the box mumbling to themselves about battues. This flat, corkscrewing target often befuddles the best of us. Countless times I've witnessed shot after shot race behind a battue.

Battues are nowhere near as difficult as they seem, once you understand the speed factor and what you must do to break them. Battues use *speed* and *direction* to deceive us. With their thin profile, air resistance is minimal, keeping their speeds high. Because shooters underestimate the battue's speed, the deception works. Almost invariably, what looks like enough window, isn't. Shot after shot passes behind the target.

Once you understand that a battue requires a little more window than you thought, implementing the correction isn't hard. Moving in unison with the battue, if you s-t-r-e-t-c-h that window open, the mysterious misses fade quickly. Close and midrange battues become meat and potato shots. Grinding up battues is a great confidence builder.

Long-range battues only get difficult when, once again, we underestimate the target's speed, drop, etc. With battues it's almost always *more in front* or *more down* than you think. We shoot so many close targets that our computer resists pushing the gun that far in front or under this target. But that's where you have to be.

Gun speed is essential to all clay shooting, but critical on battues. Again, I'm not suggesting that you rush anything. Smooth and deliberate will always get you there on time. I am saying that you must keep that gun moving through the shot.

Theories, discussions and debates are all great, but, personally, I put my faith in field results. Here are some facts on battues: 1.) contrary to what you may believe, under 40 yards, *open*, don't tighten your chokes. 2.) On extremely long battues, use slightly more choke and stay with 7½'s. 3.) If you can, pull the trigger on that battue as it shows its face and *before* it rolls over and dives. If it does roll over, the sight picture window will be *more* than you think it is!

Here are two tips for the serious target counter. First, pick a spot on

the flight path that's just before your break point. With the window stretched open, learn to pull the trigger when the target reaches that spot. Firing slightly early, the shot string will arrive at the target on time and before the battue can start further evasive maneuvers. Timed perfectly, this battue rolls over, face on, just as your shot string arrives! This also gives you a little *extra* time to work on the other target of the pair. Learning to anticipate the target rolling over and pulling the trigger a tad early just might keep that long run intact. Secondly, many top battue killers rely heavily on their instincts. They pick a spot in front of and under a battue, delivering the shot string to where the battue will be one second later. If you shoot this target enough, you can begin to sense where it's going and get the shot on its way to *that spot*. It's deadly and not overly difficult with a little practice.

Battues are a great target because they force us to think. Course owners use battues to confuse us and build the difficulty level. Choosing the best time to pull the trigger may take a little more work. No matter. Keep those hands moving—**To The Target.** Once your hands lock on that battue with the same speed and alignment and you've learned to get that window o-p-e-n, battues become cookie shots.

CHAPTER 18

THE RABBIT, LOST IN YOUR HEAD

Rabbits. Love 'em or hate 'em. Many of my students have built up a sizable mental block when it comes to breaking this relatively easy but unpredictable clay. When these individuals step onto a fur and feather field, I see anxiety, tight muscles, and I'm told how many misses are coming. It seems I have more confidence in my students here than they do.

Let's backtrack and see if we can uncover the cause of all this apprehension about rabbits.

A clay flying through the air has a relatively smooth, predictable flight path. Even the battue flies in the pattern we expect it to. Rabbits don't always oblige. I've designed rabbit presentations where the target was going in multiple directions simultaneously. The clay in mind was going left to right quartering in, down, and finally over a cliff. The direction and forward allowance on that target was constantly changing! Add the rabbit's usual surprises, and you've got an entertaining shot that puts the odds in the rabbit's favor.

It's the rabbit's erratic behavior that starts all this apprehension. It hops, hides, dives and in general frustrates people. To counter this target's unpredictable conduct, many folks fall into the trap of trying to *track each and every hippity-hop* of the bouncing clay by **aiming** at it. Doing so not only slows the gun down substantially, but it also puts enormous pressure on our shooter, who is trying very hard to be precise with a rabbit that won't cooperate.

Of all the targets we shoot, the rabbit best lends itself to "point and shoot" techniques. The Churchill method excels with rabbits. Churchill is quick and deadly, especially if this rabbit is a now-you-see-me, now-you-don't. The fore-end hand leads the attack when clays appear, but especially so on rabbits. We want to get a **pointing** motion underway as quickly as possible. This "point" prevents us from becoming overly precise.

Don't confuse point with "poke." A poke is a straight ahead motion that has no swing. With a "poke" we've got a dead gun. If I ask you to point at a rolling rabbit with your finger, you can easily watch and feel the swing motion. It's no different with your gun in hand. And where should your hands be going? **To The Target!**

Two other modifications can significantly help your shot on the next rabbit. First, *slightly* exaggerate your forward lean and increase front-foot

weight distribution to about 70%. Use caution here, as more than 70% will inhibit your swing and hurt your balance and stability. A slightly increased forward lean creates a more pronounced shoulder pocket. It also helps you keep your head on the stock where it belongs. An upright stance can cause you to lift your head in order to see over the barrel, pulling the shot high.

Next, lower that MHP. This encourages a swing that's *level* with the ground. The rib should lay close to or below parallel to the ground. A high MHP may cause you to pull down on the rabbit, creating a choppy swing. Coming up from slightly underneath keeps the rabbit in view, the swing flat and the speed right.

Teal and rabbits are the two targets with which you must let go, trusting your instincts and technique. Your natural eye-hand coordination will be more than sufficient to get that gun pointed in the right direction if you will let this happen *naturally.* Rabbits jump? True, and thank goodness they do! If I toss you an apple then call your name, how much forward allowance would you give it? None. With a very dependable reflex action, you'd simply catch it. It's no different with that rabbit. Trust your computer. Visually focus on the target. Hard. Look for shadows and inner rings. The hands will follow the eyes. It's a point and shoot proposition. If a rabbit jumps, that's the best time to pull the trigger. When the rabbit's sitting at the top of its jump, its evasive maneuvers are temporarily gone. I say temporarily because the opportunity to powder this target when it is most vulnerable will be short indeed. If you have to stop and think about it, your best shot just got past you. When it hops, smile and blow it up! **Trust your eyes and hands.**

If the course owner puts a longer rabbit on the menu, no problem. Here's the sequence: 1.) Hands **To The Target**, 2.) build your window in, 3.) pull the trigger. It really is just that simple—and deadly.

Longer rabbit shots usually give you a little more time. Sustained lead, swing-through and pull away all work well here. Here's an even better method. Apply a good Move—Mount—See the right picture and shoot.

If rabbits are a difficult target for you, the recommendations above should help considerably. Here are some common class scenarios:

1. When the rabbit appears, I see a lot of movement in the box but not enough **direction.** Where do the hands go? Right!
2. Chokes are too tight. Fact: Open chokes with light shot vaporize rabbits.
3. MHP is too high, delivering the shot low. Instead, lower the MHP and intercept from slightly under the rolling rabbit.
4. MHP is too aggressive. Most everyone chases after rabbits, after

the rabbit's raced past the gun. Move your MHP in or out *slightly*, **anticipate** and let the rabbit glide smoothly into your "moving" gun. Don't chase rabbits. When you see movement, start that gun moving. The gun and the rabbit, as with every other target, should **merge** just before the shot.

5. Point and shoot does not mean "poke" and shoot. Pointing involves movement and a swing that stays with the target. A poke simply raises the gun to the face, with no swing, and delivers the shot to where the rabbit was a second ago.
6. Students tend to swing at rabbits with one speed, fast. That's a mistake. Here's the right recipe: slow rabbit, *slow* gun—faster rabbit, *faster* gun. Match 'em up and you can disintegrate those road runners.
7. Rabbits lure you into a soft focus. As the ground behind the rabbit rushes by, the whole shot becomes a blur. Focus—look for something distinctive on the face of the rabbit—**slow it down!**

I encourage my students to relax, trust their instincts, look hard, and pull the trigger. If rabbits are a challenge for you, 95% of the time, the difficulty in the shot isn't skill related. It's mental. Rabbits are easy. Once I get my students past the anxiety and mental resistance, they love rabbits. Soon, two of four rabbits break. Then three of four and finally four of four. After that, I can't drag them off the rabbit field. No, I'm not kidding. If your hands are going **To The Target** and you trust the shot, this rabbit's history.

Smoked Rabbit Recipe

Combine: 4 Federal Gold Medal Shells with 2 open chokes.
Baste each rabbit well with a hard focus and ample
#9 shot at 1,150 fps. Serve in small pieces.

COPING WITH TARGET SPEED AND DISTANCE

Intermediate shooters sometimes double-clutch when distances increase or a target picks up some serious speed. That's understandable. However, both of these types of presentations are manageable and neither should intimidate you if you understand the common mistakes shooters make and how best to avoid them.

When you step into the box and the target is long or fast, do you feel as though the target is in control of the shot? By knowing exactly where the target is and what the target is doing, you begin to eliminate the mystery of the presentation and understand that each of these targets is hittable. Learning the correct approach to these targets will prevent you from feeling lost when you step into the box.

First, let's look at a target that uses speed to escape. The right setup and attack can neutralize much of the target's defense, which is its speed. Here's how:

1. Fast targets beg for a soft focus. Look hard and slow that target down.
2. Pick your break point carefully. Within reason, move your MHP and break point(s) out *slightly.* You don't get bonus points for breaking the target early when it's moving fastest.
3. Adjust your foot position "line" to a spot just *past* the break point. This gives you *more* gun speed, and you need it here. (Note: increased gun speed does not imply a faster mount)
4. Adjust your MHP *in,* and try to *anticipate* this target. If that proves difficult, push the muzzle a little further *away* from the trap (see #2). You

A blazing midi's flight gets cut short.

don't want to chase this target. Pick an MHP that will let some of the target speed burn off.

5. Do not look into the blur of the target launch. The target is then in soft focus and your eyes can't guide your hands. In essence, you've lost control of the shot. Instead, moving deliberately, your hands should be intercepting the target at just about the time it comes into focus.
6. Don't poke or jab at the target. Take your hands *precisely* **To The Target.** Random movement here won't get the job done. That movement needs direction. Put your direction and speed together. Go **To The Target.** Remember, no target is faster than your eyes and hands.
7. If time is short, once the hands lock on the target, get your picture and shoot! Delays here are costly, especially if this is a simultaneous pair. Going too fast and missing the first target, however, is worse than being late on targets one and two. Don't rush and go out of control on number one, but get it done as quickly as you can and still break the target.
8. This target is designed to make you miss behind. You probably want to open that window a little more and definitely keep that gun moving!

Remember, if a target seems fast it's because you are allowing it to be fast. **Slow that target down with a hard focus.** When you rush and lose control of the shot, even a little, the shot will fly wide of the clay. As targets speed up, I ask my students to slow everything down. All the gun speed in the world is useless without direction. A calm, smooth, well-guided gun mount going **To The Target** will get you on the target faster, while keeping you in control of the shot.

Let's move on to longer targets, say in the range of 50 yards. Sooner or later, it seems that everyone yearns to gain some consistency here. Of all presentations, long shots—both hits and misses—are usually surrounded by the most mystery.

In the preceding chapters, we've learned that our natural ability to point at something is a valuable resource we can tap to improve our shooting. Close targets and some medium-range targets are fairly easy for point-and-shoot techniques. When the longer target enters the picture, however, the distance involved makes it harder for us to feel connected to the target. Shooting at a longer target using instincts alone can leave a shooter feeling lost. Hits and misses can be a mystery.

Taking the mystery out of longer-range shooting requires solid,

dependable technique. This is why some shooters who are comfortable on short range targets often stumble when the range increases.

Longer targets *can* be broken consistently. The following pointers should help:

1. The margin for error on longer shots is minimal. Mistakes made in the box are multiplied before the shot string reaches the target. As always, it's Move—Mount—Shoot. Once you feel that you and the target are moving in unison, establish the sight picture and get the shot on its way. Don't rush, but pull that trigger when the picture's right. The pull away, swing-through and sustained lead methods all work well here.
2. 80% of the misses I observe here are missed behind the target. The windows you are used to seeing may be insufficient for the longer target. Open that window **more.** Don't succumb to the temptation to try to measure a lead precisely. Gun speed is critical here, so measuring the forward allowance almost guarantees a miss behind the target. Your gun will slow down, and that's a fatal mistake on any sporting clays target, and especially on longer presentations. At all costs, keep that gun moving. Good follow through is essential.
3. It's a shame to hit a target and not get credit for it. 7½'s really earn their keep on longer targets. 2¾ dram loads won't let you down here.
4. Try to shoot this target when it's under power and before it can drop and/or curve, complicating the presentation. If possible, your break point should precede the target taking evasive action. The trigger should snap when the target reaches the break point, not later.

If everything seems right and the target is still not breaking:

- Are you sure you are giving it enough forward allowance? If you're not sure, do this. Trust me here. I want you to deliberately miss this target slightly in front. Yes, on purpose. Miss in front. More often than not, when you try to do this, the target breaks.
- When your swing drifts off the target flight path, you've "lost the line." Is your muzzle staying *on the target flight path?* A swing that "loses the line" will deliver the shot above or below the target every time.
- Are you pulling the trigger late? Pull the trigger where you've established the break point and have the most gun speed. Trying

to be very careful on longer targets is a fatal mistake because it starts gun deceleration.

Most shooters who miss long targets are focused on their shooting method. I find method to be secondary. As a coach, the three most common mistakes I see are: 1.) inadequate forward allowance, 2.) drifting off the target line or flight path, and 3) aiming at the target, which shaves precious gun speed.

Most intermediate shooters simply haven't yet learned the correct sight pictures on longer targets. A student who's struggling with the longer target can't seem to get the window open enough. I ask this person to find the picture he likes on the target and either add a little more, or double it, or triple it—and pull the trigger. When he finally does, much to his astonishment, the target breaks. Now that he has seen the picture, he can repeat the shot successfully. Shooting is always a game of pictures, but especially so on the longer presentations.

Don't panic on longer or faster presentations. Attack these targets with a plan. At all costs, keep that gun mount smooth and under control *and keep the gun moving.* When close and mid-range targets pick up serious speed, use your setup and method of attack to neutralize the target's speed.

Here's a closing thought regarding to the best shooting method. Use yours. Stay on the target line, open the window more, and pull the trigger now.

You may have stumbled a bit when you first started shooting closer targets. It wasn't long, however, until you attempted close targets smoothly and with confidence. Persevere, and the same will be true with the longer presentations. Be patient with yourself and don't be afraid to seek out a competent instructor. Personally, my favorite target is the long crosser. There's a lot of gratification in watching my plan come together and seeing the target explode in mid-flight. So concentrate, apply the right techniques and watch that target come apart right on schedule.

Chapter 20

SHOOT 'EM YOUR WAY

Because I see so many shooters fall into this trap, I wrote an article for *Sporting Clays* magazine. The novice is more easily excused for this very natural error. As an aspiring intermediate, I'm hoping your attention to the message here will keep you on the right path.

Maybe you've noticed, people have a tendency to follow the leader. At a banquet buffet, no one wants to go first. When someone finally stands up, everyone else stands up and follows. First time here and can't find Field One at Acme Sporting Clays? No problem, follow the squad ahead of you. It's just something we humans do. Following this tendency in your shooting game, however, might not take you where you want to go.

Just outside Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, The Warrington Club meets the needs of the novice, intermediate and advanced shooter. There's a nestled pair which is close and moderately paced, moving from left to right. An instinctive shooter with a quick gun will usually take target number one in the first window of opportunity and the second just as it clears a small stand of trees and is dropping softly. Shooting the pair this way, as I prefer, leaves the second target an easy floating single. From a strategy standpoint, the risk is a little higher when taking the mini early, but manageable for some shooters. Killing the first target early makes for a high reward on target two. Contrast this to another strategy, in which the approach is to not risk either target in the first window. Instead, both targets are attempted after they clear the trees. Using this strategy, while it's true they've slowed down considerably, they're also further away and dropping.

Your choice. Both strategies work.

I use the field at The Warrington Club as an example because I was the first shooter on my squad during a practice round, and once again I saw those behind me fall into the trap we're going to discuss. I see this quite often, and wasn't surprised when the very next weekend it happened again.

I was keeping score on a different course, with a field similar to the one at The Warrington Club. This field threw a right-to-left pair of

standards on the far side of stacked hay bales. The previously mentioned strategies were appropriate here. Earlier or later on bird one, your choice.

Jim makes targets disappear faster than your paycheck. Stepping into the box, Jim was first, and I knew what was coming. Here was another opportunity to watch this "follow the leader" impulse at work. True to my prediction, Jim took the first target early, like I had the week before during the practice round, leaving the remaining single an easy second target. As fast as the trapper could reload, Jim promptly got, and killed, six for six. Jim's approach to the targets set the stage for the rest of the squad. Having watched Jim's impressive gun work, shooter number two stepped up beside me, his computer now programmed. There was no doubt in my mind that he was going to attempt the targets exactly as Jim had. After all, Jim could do it. Right?

In fairness to shooter number two, others on the squad followed precisely in Jim's footsteps, all with different results. Each person struggled mightily to catch up with that hustling first target, with many shots falling behind. Seeing both targets emerge intact on the other side of the bales, and having but one shot left, our flustered competitors had to quickly choose one of the pair. Time remaining was rapidly approaching zero. Two targets, one shell. Which one, which one? Tick-tock, tick—bang. Lost-lost.

Let's establish that your strategy at each field is of paramount importance in your shooting game. Having said that, note also that you should insert your ability level into the equation. For instance, if you are unsure whether or not you can break that first bird in the first window, another approach may be your best option. Because the targets are slowing down and falling rapidly, your choices are limited, but you could take the pair after they've cleared the bales.

Before you dash into the box, here's a third option. Depending upon your skill level, maybe you can take the first clay early. You could try it on the first pair. If your plan works, great, keep going. If it doesn't and you can't seem to overtake that first bird, you've only dropped one so far. Time to change. Back to option two, and you can work on the two remaining pairs after they've cleared the bales.

What the person ahead of you is doing may be, or may not be, the best strategy for you.

With strategy on your "to do" list at each field, it does merit watching others. As you watch the person in the box, you'll note where this person is breaking the targets and which one is being taken first. I suggest you look for any advantage that the people ahead of you may not have noticed. Here's one example. Often, people see the targets for the first time only

after they've cleared some large tree or other obstacle. Be aggressive with your eyes. Look back and try to find the target. If you can, doing so may give you the target line and other useful information.

Say the person ahead of you executes each target with deadly efficiency. All that means to you is that this was the right strategy for him or her. Your skill level might not allow you to copy that strategy. Maybe you have a much better plan. Your method here may be such that you can eliminate target number one even sooner, leaving target two as a simple pot-pie shot.

Not often, but sometimes reversing the target order can be to your advantage. After all, if the first shooter in the box shot the targets backwards, should you?

As you try to determine which target to take first, note what each of them is doing. Just because a target is closer or slower doesn't mean it's your best choice for target number one. In many cases, shooting the slower target first allows target number two to gain some serious distance from you. Here's what can happen. Smiling because you pulled the trigger and vaporized the closer clay, that's the good news. As you move your gun to the second target, that little orange dot splashing into the far side of the pond—that's the other bird in your pair.

Point being, use your skills and your strategy when you step into the box, not someone else's.

Here's another snare we want to avoid. Shooters often fall prey to this, though it can be easily side-stepped.

The best example of this is the shooting pace of Gary Bloom, owner of Rock Mountain Sporting Clays. When targets appear, Gary's rhythm is quicker than a cobra with his Perazzi. Any target in close will have a short life span indeed. A serious competitor, he fares well on targets at all distances, but, in my opinion, fast and close is Gary's specialty.

What does this mean to you?

Well, let's put your name on the score sheet right below Gary's. As Gary steps out of the box, you step in.

Why is that important?

Because where and how he breaks his targets just might be influencing *your* approach to *your* targets. Since few people shoot with his quick rhythm, chances are good you won't be able to duplicate his style. If you stop and think about it, that probably wasn't your intention anyway. And there's the trap. Unintentional as it may be, many of us have a tendency to follow the shooter in front of us. Not only might you have chosen the same break points as Gary, but you may be following his turbo pace as well.

It pays to remember: these are your targets, not someone else's. Shoot them *your* way.

On a long, high crosser, I have an effective but slow and deliberate tempo. There's no rush because I have time to let the shot develop. I've often watched the people behind me follow the same strategy. When done properly and the trigger is pulled punctually, this method is deadly efficient. However, this same quiet gun mount and swing usually lulls the inexperienced shooter into a tardy trigger pull and a lost target. Once again, use caution when the person ahead of you is breaking targets. Learn what you can, but remember, they took their skills into the box, just as you will take yours.

It's gratifying to correctly diagnose the presentation and put the targets in the right order. For some presentations, especially if you mix and match methods, there's usually a half dozen or more approaches to the targets. Your goal is to maximize the reward on each target and minimize the risk wherever possible.

Confident that you know which bird to break first, choosing the correct break points puts us back into the risk-reward equation. A quartering away target is fastest at the second it is launched. Also note that it's closer. If you intentionally wait on the bird it will slow down, and that's good. However, the cost of waiting is that the target is now further away. Somewhere in the middle is the best place for you to break that target. To find that place, you want to try to minimize the risk and maximize the reward. Doing so on this target would mean shooting as early as possible (there's the risk), but allowing just enough speed to burn off so that you know you can break it a little further down the flight path (there's the reward). It's a balancing act of choices in which your decisions will affect the outcome of your shots. Making good choices is an exciting part of our sport and my message here is simple. Make the best choices for *you*.

On this same quartering target, if you try to break it as quickly as Gary Bloom does, chances are you may miss. Gary's willing to increase the risk because he's confident he can effectively manage that risk and reap the reward of breaking the *second target at closer range*. We have to find the equation that most closely matches our skill level. This will give us our best opportunity to walk away with X X X X.

By following the strategies of the best shooter on the squad or the shooter in front of you, you may go places you hadn't intended to go. Trying to duplicate Gary Bloom or Jim's approach to targets may be the wrong recipe for you. It's important to know your own abilities, and on each field

make your shooting choices wisely. Every good shooter knows the value of planning ahead.

Learn all you can and share what you know, but make your own path as you step into the shooting box. If you want to follow someone, the best person I can think of is your instructor. Then, at the end of the round, follow me. I know where they're serving dinner.

MAKING YOUR STRATEGY WORK:

1. Learn from the shooter in front of you but apply your own strategy.
2. Asking the shooter in front of you, "How far did you lead them?" can create more confusion than answers.
3. Pick the break points that most closely match your ability level.
4. Look for an advantage that no one else has noticed.
5. Shooting at a target a little later, or earlier, may be to your advantage; watch closely.
6. If possible, take the target(s) before they change direction.
7. A shooting school can teach you strategy and shot execution.

Finishing a beautiful long run.

Section V

POLISHING YOUR PERFORMANCE

NOTES FROM THE COACH'S JOURNAL

Preparing for our trip into the box, we face an interesting array of choices. Making the right decisions on equipment, clothing, chokes, loads, strategies and setups in the box are just some of sporting clay's prerequisites. Sometimes, ballistics and field data help to make these decisions easier. Other times, personal requirements and preferences make choices a highly individual process, leaving lots of room to debate what is best.

Here are some of my suggestions, based on extensive competition, coaching and field experience.

Building Long Runs

1. Check your score card for accuracy before you leave a tournament field.
2. Be wary of studying the master score board at the clubhouse in the middle of the tournament. Comparing scores can generate unwanted pressure in your next round.
3. Relax your body, especially your arms, before saying "pull." Tense muscles slow response to the target and signal that you are about to "try too hard."
4. Regardless of shooting method, follow through with your swing.
5. Tired shooters make mistakes. Drink fluids, eat fruits and rest when you can. Morning squads usually have cooler temperatures and better weather. Take care of the shooter. That's you.
6. Shoot often; now shoot some more. If you pay attention, every pull of the trigger will teach you something.
7. Have fun with your shooting. Challenge yourself. Let go and trust yourself with the shot. Take the risk. Enjoy the surprise.

Standard Sporting Clays Guns:

Over-Unders

PROS:

- Choice of two chokes—one per target
- Very reliable for both shots
- Gun open and empty—safety easily visible

CONS:

- Somewhat heavier
- More recoil—dependent upon load

Semi-autos

PROS:

- Lighter weight—may help the shooter with an aggressive style
- Point well
- Substantial recoil reduction

CONS:

- Reliability dependent upon keeping the gun clean and lubricated
- One choke to handle two targets regardless of distances and other variables
- Triple check to ensure action open and all shells removed

Chokes and Loads

Take a moment and think about the wide variety of target presentations course owners throw at us. Speeds, directions, angles and target sizes are creatively arranged to deceive us. Field experience has taught me two hard and fast rules about chokes and loads. One, there are very few hard and fast rules. Two, just about every choke and every legal shot size can break every sporting clays target.

So how can you make the right choices, knowing almost every guideline here can be ignored, and still break the target? In staying with the risk-reward strategy, we want to make choices that minimize the risk and maximize the reward. As you prepare to step into the box, here are some suggestions on how to push the odds in your favor.

CHOKE REFERENCES

Cyl. = Cylinder choke **Skeet** = Skeet choke
I.C. = Improved Cylinder **Mod**. = Modified
Imp. Mod. = Improved Modified

PRESENTATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

STANDARD TARGETS (108-110mm)

Crossing (Bird appears flat)

15-25 yds:	Cyl. & Skeet	9's or 8½'s
25-35 yds:	I.C.	8½'s or 8's
35-45 yds	I.C.. or Mod.	8's
45+ yds:	Mod. or Imp. Mod.	7½'s

Shooting from underneath

	Cylinder to I.C.	9's or 8½'s

Shooting at the "top" of the Standard target

15-25 yds:	Cyl. to Skeet	8's
25-35 yds:	I.C.	8's or 7½'s
35-45 yds:	Mod.	7½'s
45+ yds:	Imp. Mod.	7½'s

MIDIS (90mm)

Crossing

15-25 yds:	Skeet	9's or 8½'s
25-35 yds:	I.C. or Mod.	8's
35⁺ yds:	Mod. to Imp. Mod.	8's or 7½'s

Shooting from underneath

	Skeet or I.C.	8½'s or 8's

Shooting at the top of the Midi

15-25 yds:	Skeet	8's
25-35 yds:	I.C. or Mod.	8's
35⁺ yds:	Mod. or Imp. Mod.	8's or 7½'s

MINIS (60mm)

Crossing

15-25 yds:	Skeet or I.C.	9's or 8½'s
25-35 yds:	I.C. to Mod.	9's or 8½'s
35⁺ yds:	Mod.	9's or 8½'s

Shooting from underneath

	Skeet or I.C.	9's or 8½'s

Shooting at the top of the Mini

15-25 yds:	Skeet or I.C.	9's or 8½'s
25⁺ yds:	Mod. to Imp. Mod.	9's or 8½'s

BATTUES

Face on at:

15-35 yds:	Cyl. or Skeet	9's
35-45 yds:	Skeet	8½'s or 8's
45⁺ yds:	I.C. or Mod.	8's
Long range	Mod.	8's or 7½'s

RABBITS

Crossing

5-25 yds:	Cyl.	9's or 8½'s
25-35 yds:	Skeet or I.C.	8's
35-45 yds:	I.C. or Mod.	8's or 7½'s
45⁺ yds:	Mod.	7½'s

Quartering

Same as Crossing

On Edge

15-30 yds:	Skeet to Mod.	8's or 7½'s

As a teacher, looking at this reference chart scares me. I envision you carrying this chart, sixteen chokes and your range finder to the next tournament. Please don't. It's not that the chart isn't accurate. It is. What's much more important are your shooting skills.

So why didn't I simplify the chart? Because, regardless of what a particular choke and load combination is capable of scientifically, if our shooter has little confidence in this combination, the odds move to the target's favor. Use the combination that gives you total confidence.

Consider carrying one choke for each of the following distances: short (cylinder), medium (I.C.) and long range (Imp. Mod.). As for shot sizes, keep things simple by stuffing one pocket full of 9's and the other with

7½'s. You're amply prepared for the course in front of you. Some shoot 8's for almost everything except the very longest of targets. There's some real merit to that.

What about plated shot? I like plated shot on very long targets. However, on rabbits and battues in particular, plated shot has occasionally been known to simply drill holes and not cause a target to break. When these two targets are presented face-on, consider using standard 8's or 7½'s, non-plated. If these targets turn or get on edge, using plated shot can get the job done nicely. Used judiciously, plated shot can be devastating on our longest presentations.

Ammunition

Each of us attaches a certain level of importance to a broken target. For personal reasons, target count in sporting remains a high priority for many of us. The challenge of scoring well motivates us to return to the shooting box, week after week. For those of us who aspire to a consistently higher level of performance in the shooting box, the stakes are also a little higher. For this reason, we scrutinize equipment choices more carefully.

Ultimately, what actually breaks the target? The shot string, of course. Whether you are a corporate, social or competitive shooter, the adage that you get what you pay for applies to ammunition.

When I step into the box, my shooting is more than personal, it's also a business. For this reason I use what I feel to be the best available equipment. Here are my top two ammunition choices—the same choices of many other names in HOA circles around the world.

• Baschieri & Pellagri (B & P) is arguably the finest shotgun ammunition in the world. Their shot is consistently spherical and uniform in size from pellet to pellet. Combined with exceptional powders, hulls and wads that have proven their worth on the firing line, B & P has captured 5 Olympic Golds, 4 World Cups, 60 World Championships and 52 European Championships. This highly respected, fifth-generation family business provides the shooter with a premium product that delivers devastating ballistics where it counts the most, on the target.

• Federal Cartridge Company manufactures the deservedly famous "Federal Papers." This particular shell, in numerous configurations, has a long and extensive championship history in skeet, trap and sporting. Its enviable reputation for grinding up targets is well founded and tenaciously guarded by its users. Few shotshells have ever surpassed the consistently high performance levels of this and other Federal shells.

Stocks

Your rifle or shotgun can be more than a tool. How it looks, how it feels and how it handles contribute to its overall performance. This is especially true with shotguns. A custom shotgun comes alive when taken out of the safe. Dynamics, or how naturally a shotgun points in your hands, is the heart of a shotgun. Whereas rifles deliver precision, sporting shotguns should convey a feeling of fluid speed and grace.

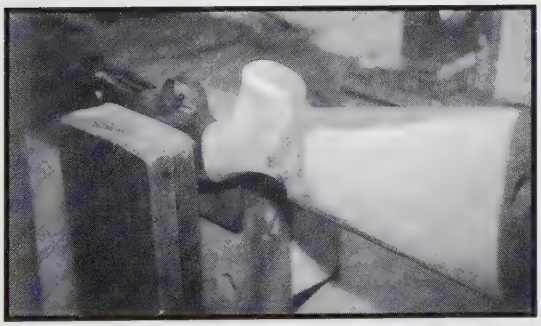
An over-the-counter shotgun asks that you fit your body to its measurements. A custom-fitted and stocked shotgun molds itself to your measurements. Dynamics, recoil reduction, performance, comfort and confidence are all enhanced with a custom-stocked shotgun. For the sporting enthusiast, I highly recommend the following for stocking and fitting services:

Stocks:

- Wenig's Custom Gunstocks, Lincoln, MO 660-547-3334
- Allem's Gun Craft, Zionsville, PA 215-679-9016

Fitting:

- Peter Crabtree, The Meadows, Smarr, GA 912-994-9910



A custom stock—preparing the blank.

I. If you could only use one choke for all around sporting, what would it be?
My first choice would be the Improved Cylinder. It can be forgiving on the closer target then, when asked, it can reach out much farther than it should—with authority.

II. What's your first choice of shooting method?
An experienced coach won't usually dwell on method. Only the right sight picture will kill the bird, **regardless** of *how* the picture was achieved. Strengths and weaknesses of each method aside, gun speed kills targets. Executed properly, the pull away method motivates and delivers excellent gun speed.

III. 1 oz. or 1⅛?
Make your decision based on whichever load gives you the most confidence. Debates and ballistic comparisons are fun but, truth is, they kill targets equally well.

IV. 2¾ dram or 3?
Same as number three. Note: Recoil is cumulative and 3-dram loads can gradually impair performance.

V. Pick the best overall barrel length.
Best for whom? Oh, you said *overall:* 30 inches.

VI. Why do I shoot well one day and poorly the next?
If your setup and mechanics (shot execution) are inconsistent, results will be inconsistent. If this symptom is not chronic, chalk it up to a bad day and look forward to the next trip to Field One.

VII. Why can't I stop seeing two targets in a true pair?
You're not looking at the first target hard enough. Don't look at the target. Look for a piece of the target like the dome, the rings on the shoulder or a sliver of the black underside.

VIII. Will 9's break targets dependably?
NO target can escape a well-placed load of 9's inside 30 yards; and they can break face-on targets like battues much further than that. Very high overheads are crushed by 9's. 9's have a killer instinct for minis, even at stretched distances.

IX. Just who is the very best shot?
I'm sorry, could you be a little more specific about which tournament you were referring to?

X. Just who is the very best instructor?
The full-time teacher who cares about your progress, works to protect the long term integrity of our sport, and has a passion for teaching.

XI. Where did I miss that target?
Learning "why" will help you more on the next target.

XII. Is gun fit important?
It can build confidence and that is always important. It becomes more important when one target can mean the difference between 1st and 2nd place.

XIII. I'm pleased with my short game, but why do I struggle on long targets?
Because you are less familiar with the sight pictures on long targets than you are with short and medium range. Training, patience and some work can make them hittable, consistently. Once learned, longer targets are **not** difficult.

XIV. Do I have the potential to shoot better than I do now?
Yes. Improvement in performance comes with learning and applying new techniques that complement your present game.

XV. Why is so much of my shooting a mystery?
No one has taught you what, when, why, where and how. In the box, apprehension comes from not knowing what to do. Knowledge is confidence. Confidence is knowing what to do and how. Those who know, can. Those who can, do.

After my lesson, what should I be practicing?

1. **Think positively** going into the box, during your shooting and coming out. Even if you are missing, reinforce what you did right. Measure your progress by noting what you are learning, not just by final target count.

2. Have a specific goal before you step onto the range. I suggest you write it down. An hour later, if you've forgotten, reach into your pocket and read your note. Stay focused.

3. Start on easier targets and work up. This builds rhythm and confidence into your practice session.

4. When you miss, ask yourself "why?" Here's a checklist:

a.	Did my hands go To The Target?	__Yes	__No
b.	Did I have a hard focus?	__Yes	__No
c.	Did the picture look right?	__Yes	__No
d.	Did I trust myself?	__Yes	__No

5. When you are breaking a presentation well—*if you can*—stay there and drill this shot over and over until you know it's locked into your inventory. Shoot a box of shells here, maybe more.

6. When you are finished, whether it be a practice round, social round or a tournament, you have a choice. You can now discuss, think about and reinforce what you did wrong, or **what you did right**. Only one choice delivers more targets in future rounds. Note: Analyzing or discussing a miss to uncover the cause is a positive, not a negative.

CHAPTER 22

3¼ DRAMS OF TRUTH

I've been around guns and hunting for half a century, and it takes more than a fancy stock to get my earnest attention. The common denominator for success in the shooting box is hard work. Shooting well is a learned, not inherited skill. How much and how fast you learn will be largely dependent upon your personal investment. As you walk onto the range, harness your expectations and practice patience. If you are serious about shooting better scores, consistently, instruction sessions and quality practice are the fastest ways to improve your game.

Here are twelve rules that I believe will move you steadily toward your goals:

1. Safety is always first. Set the example for others to follow.
2. When you make mistakes, be as patient, kind and respectful to yourself as you would be to your shooting partner.
3. When it comes to practice, adding quality to quantity is the recipe for improvement.
4. Leave your misses on the course but take your progress home.
5. Good shooting habits are worth far more than good shooting.
6. Guns and loads are just tools. It's what you do with them that breaks targets.
7. A good score is determined not by target count, but by your best effort.
8. You have zero control over the target. Focus on what you are doing in the box.
9. Knowledge and disciplined work will deliver more broken targets than barrel lengths, shooting methods, chokes and loads.
10. What you are thinking about—the picture in your mind—will affect your performance. Choose your images well.
11. Thank your trapper and referee.
12. First, learn what to do. Then trust what you've learned.

Introducing someone to our sport, sharing friendships new and old, good food, different courses, breaking a tough pair and laughing off an easy miss are the best of Sporting Clays. Our sport is evolving into

the next chapter of its development. We are the caretakers. Safeguard our future shooting privileges by heeding the regulations as you step onto the range. Put the targets in front of you, misses behind you, and your friends beside you.

Finally, I hope you will join me for the next phase of our journey where we will discuss:

- Talent is a gift, skills are learned—reaching your true potential.
- Shooting well and feeling good—how you can repeat that.
- Who you are and how your physical and emotional make-up are tied directly to the outcome of each trigger pull.
- The definition of concentration, why it is so vital and how to maintain it.
- Why negative thoughts and images derail your best performance.
- How to use your emotions to motivate, not intimidate.
- Why we shouldn't "try so hard."
- Effectively neutralizing tournament pressures.
- Breaking the target *before* it leaves the trap.
- Completing a long run of 100 straight, without your gun.

Until then, smile when you miss. The guy who knows he's one target ahead of you—this keeps him watching *your* targets.

DEFINITIONS

ANTICIPATE: Anticipating the target means: 1.) move the MHP back. 2.) move the gun towards the intercept point before the target arrives there—whether the target can be seen at launch or not. Done properly, the target and the muzzle will arrive at the intercept point at the exact same time.

GUN FIT: Primary goal: To make the point at which the eye over the gun is looking and point of impact the same. Secondary considerations: lessening felt recoil; improving both comfort and gun management.

GUN MANAGEMENT: Good gun management includes the gun's setup, mount and shot execution. MHP is correct--mount has no wasted motions—shot execution includes a punctual intercept, a proper sight picture and follow through.

HARD FOCUS: The shooter is looking sharply at a part of the target, i.e., the dome, shoulder, skirt, bottom. Necessary to guide the hands with precision.

HARMONY: "Getting in harmony" with the target is the result of a proper intercept. Muzzle speed and direction are initially the same as the target. Time spent in harmony is important. It can be observed by the shooter but is very short in duration because the computer is building the right forward allowance picture.

INTERCEPT: A place on the target flight path—chosen in advance—where the muzzle and target will merge in the early stages of the gun mount or swing.

MHP: Muzzle hold point. During the setup, the muzzle is visually placed on or below the target line at a point that will simplify and expedite a punctual intercept.

MINDS: Conscious and Sub-conscious
CONSCIOUS: Your concentration. Has limited space for a short, simple

message in the form of a thought or picture—which can be positive or negative. Has limited ability and requires discipline to hold one thought.

SUB-CONSCIOUS: A giant, hypersonic computer efficiently learning, combining and coordinating numerous tasks and assignments. The subconscious mind uses all its resources to complete the instructions in the conscious mind. Example: "I can't hit rabbits" is programmed into the conscious mind. The subconscious mind will now ensure that you miss one target after another. We have a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the outcome is largely dependent upon which message is placed in the conscious mind. In like manner, positive thoughts are rewarded with an improved performance.

SIGHT PICTURE: The visual, spatial relationship between the muzzle and the target. Forward allowance or window.

SOFT FOCUS: The target is not seen clearly. It appears as a blur. Result: hands move to somewhere "around" the target leading to inconsistencies.

TIME Management: Good time management is efficient use of the time the target gives you. Goal: zero time wasted during target intercept and the shot.

TO THE TARGET: Initiated in the move portion of the gun mount. The hands and gun move directly to, and with, the target.

WINDOW: Forward allowance or sight picture. "Keeping the window open" means not allowing the target to *close* your sight picture. This is best accomplished with acceleration away from the target and/or follow through.

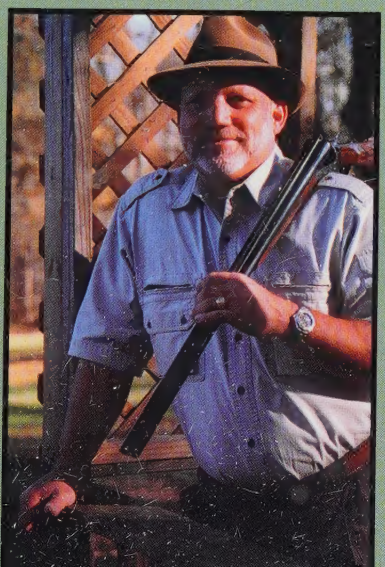
Notes

It was October, 1961. Pennsylvania's autumn fields glistened in the morning sun. The air was sharp with anticipation as my sneakers slipped through the wet grass. With a raucous announcement the cockbird rose from the briars, only to tumble at the bark of the little 20 gauge side-by-side. I can take you to the exact spot where that pheasant—my first—fell.

During ninth grade, the Hornady Reloading Manual or one of Jack O'Connor's distant hunting adventures usually sat atop my Geography text. I was there when America's hunting fraternity celebrated the birth of Winchester's .338 and Remington's 7MM magnums. Hunting fur and feathered game, Pennsylvania's mountains were not as steep as they are now.

Sporting clays came to our shores and gave American shooters a more honest measure of our shotgunning abilities. When the N.S.C.A. offered a Level I instructor's program, I sat in the front row. Level II and III found me in that same chair. My quest for knowledge contributed to my becoming the first US instructor certified by The British Guild of Shooting Instructors. As a competitor, coach and photojournalist, there are also two books and twenty-five course designs and installations on my resume. Thankfully, Sporting has become a full-time preoccupation.

My students will tell you, I have a boundless passion for this sport. Their gratification in breaking a challenging target is exceeded only by my own. We're learning from each other, sharing the very best of times.



To The Target lays out a **shooting system** that is readily understood, and dependable where it counts—in the shooting box.
For the cost of one round of sporting clays, ***To The Target*** teaches you:

- How to set up the break—a pre-shot checklist
- How to break the target—with step-by-step checkpoints that can be easily remembered and repeated
- How to put your Mental Game to work

"Dan's clear, concise instructions for bettering your wingshooting techniques, honed through years of coaching, come through beautifully in ***To The Target***. Shooters of all skill levels will find many insightful tips within these pages pleasantly delivered in the author's easygoing yet no-nonsense style of writing, brilliantly illustrated for pinpoint clarity."

— George Conrad, Editor, Sporting Clays Magazine

"***To The Target*** is full of valuable information directly pertaining to the shotgun sports. Dan Schindler tells you what to do and then goes the extra step and tells you why. Knowing what to do will break targets, understanding why will break targets consistently. ***To The Target*** will be an essential part of any shooters library. I just wish it had been around when I started."

— Andy Duffy, Holder of 8 National Titles in Sporting Clays and FITASC

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